

NAVIGATING (TRANS-)NATIONALITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA:
ONLINE SOCIOLINGUISTIC PRACTICES AMONG IRANIANS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I investigate the (meta)linguistic and (meta)semiotic processes through which identities are constructed, negotiated, and evaluated online and explore how these processes are guided by social actors' perceptions of online and offline normativities. Following online and offline ethnography, I focus on online practices of Iranian Social Media (henceforth SM) users within and outside Iran to examine how their normative understandings—of contexts, identities, and linguistic/semiotic behavior—lead to the (collective) construction and evaluation of identities at various scale-levels, including more saliently 'local', 'national', and 'trans-national' levels. My ethnographically-grounded analysis is conducted within a choronotopic-scalar framework which I demonstrate provides the necessary analytical-theoretical tools to capture the nuances and intricacies of the online identity work.

I draw on different types of online data (including tweet texts, photos, videos, Internet memes, comments, etc.) from different social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Twitter) and analyze them in three, what can be considered as, different yet related case studies. The rationale behind focusing on different case studies is to show how similar processes are at work in the negotiations of identity among Iranian SM users inside and outside of Iran, and how the analytical concepts used in this dissertation help account for these seemingly different online contexts.

In Chapter 5, I examine the multimodal identity work done by migrant Iranians through Internet memes. I focus on a specific genre of memes, what I refer to as 'diaspora' memes, and analyze how differently-scaled chronotopes of normalcy associated with 'here' (i.e. diaspora) and 'there' (i.e. Iran) are brought along and embedded within the meme frame to create a space where hybrid transnational identities are performed. I also show how normativities of texts, at

various levels of semiosis, become indexically linked to normativities of contexts through these chronotopic invocations. In Chapter 6, I focus on the constructions of an idealized image of (migrant-)Iranianness in a context of virality and through SM users' orientations to larger-scale hegemonic chronotopes. I analyze a viral music video and the 'reaction videos' made in response to it to explore how this 'ideal (migrant-)Iranian' comes to be constructed and how the artists in the music video are evaluated through the lens of this image. I again specifically show the indexical links made between normativities of texts and normativities of contexts through SM users' orientations. Finally, in Chapter 7, I turn my attention to online and offline sociolinguistic normativity by focusing on a new non-standard online Farsi orthographic norm. I discuss the chronotopic organization of SM users' perceptions of orthographic normativity through tracing another idealized image of Iranianness and how this image gets constructed and contested by SM users.

Overall, I argue that a better insight into the dynamics of online communication, with its complexity, multisemioticity, polycentricity, and trans-locality/-nationality requires an approach that can accurately capture the organization of normativities—of text, at various semiotic levels, and of contexts—and how these are constantly invoked and adopted in online acts of identification. I demonstrate through the three case studies mentioned above that a framework that integrates the notions of chronotopes and scales together can allow for such detailed investigation of online interaction. Finally, the dissertation contributes empirically to the scholarship on online sociolinguistics by focusing on and drawing attention to an understudied people.

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*To Farzad,
for being the friend I needed,
the family I missed,
and the guide I trusted,
in 'ghorbat'*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND	20
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	35
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY	50
CHAPTER 5: MULTISEMIOTICITY AND PERFORMING MIGRANT-IRANIANNESSTHROUGH INTERNET MEMES	59
CHAPTER 6: ‘ACCENT’ AND EVALUATING (MIGRANT-)IRANIANNESSON YOUTUBE.....	91
CHAPTER 7: ORTHOGRAPHY AND CONSTRUCTING/CONTESTING THE IMAGEOF A ‘GOOD’ IRANIAN	142
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS	175
REFERENCES	186
APPENDIX A	208
APPENDIX B	209

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the processes through which identities are linguistically and semiotically constructed, negotiated, and evaluated in online spaces. More specifically, I focus on Social Media users' (henceforth SM users) understandings of normativity and how these understandings lead to the construction and evaluation of identities at various scale-levels, including more saliently 'local', 'national', and 'trans-national' levels. The empirical focus of the dissertation is on linguistic/semiotic practices of Iranian SM users both *within* and *outside* Iran to answer the following question: **How do Iranians discursively construct and evaluate (migrant-)Iranianness on social media and what accounts for the heterogeneity and complexity of their (meta)linguistic/semiotic practices?** Particularly, how do SM users' understandings of normativity (of contexts, identities, and linguistic/semiotic behavior) guide their discursive-evaluative practices relative to (migrant-)Iranianness in social media interactions? And what theoretical-analytical tools allow us to understand the nature of these perceptions of normalcy on one hand, and help us account for the complexities of interactions in the era of intensified mobility—of people, resources, discourses, and information—on the other?

To answer these questions, I draw on different types of online data (including tweet texts, photos, videos, Internet memes, comments, etc.) from different social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Twitter) and analyze them in three, what can be considered as, different yet related case studies. The rationale behind focusing on different case studies is to show how similar processes are at work in the negotiations of identity among Iranian SM users inside and outside of Iran, and how the analytical concepts used in this dissertation help account for these

seemingly different online contexts. In what follows, I elaborate on the theoretical and analytical concepts used in the dissertation, i.e. *chronotopes* and *scales*, and lay out the *chronotopic-scalar* approach adopted to study the complex identification and meaning-making processes in these different online contexts.

1.2. Theoretical-Analytical Framework

In this dissertation, I take a chronotopic-scalar approach to the analysis of online communication. Considering online communication as an epitome of what Appadurai (1996) has termed *vernacular globalization*, where the increased agency through new technological affordances has allowed the social actors to engage in more *bottom-up* globalization processes, with all its complexity, mobility, and polycentricity¹, there is a need for an explanatory analytical-theoretical tool to capture the sociolinguistic phenomena happening in such context. Viewing communication, online communication included, as a normative-semiotic system, I adopt and integrate two interconnected analytical tools in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics research, i.e. *chronotopes* (Agha 2007; Bakhtin 1981; Blommaert 2015; Silverstein, 2005) and *scales* (Blommaert, 2015; see also Carr & Lempert, 2016; Gal, 2016), to examine how SM users navigate this system. Chronotopes are time-space-personhood bundles that organize social information and contextualize discourses in interaction and meaning-making (Agha 2007; Bakhtin 1981; Blommaert 2015). They get (re)constructed and adopted in processes of encoding and decoding meaning in social interactions. Blommaert (2017) refers to them as ‘mobile contexts’ associated with certain norms, identities, and indexicalities that are (re)constructed through interaction. Socialization, in fact, involves a variety of *(re-)chronotopization* processes

¹ ‘Polycentricity’ refers to the co-presence of multiple sets of centers, each with their own norms, moralities, and orders of indexicality, in any interactional context that guide individuals’ social behavior (Blommaert et al., 2005; Blommaert, 2005)

(Karimzad, 2020) as chronotopic images get dynamically constructed and constantly updated through social interaction and are added to actors' communicative repertoires guiding their social and sociolinguistic behavior, interpretation, and evaluation in future interactions. In this sense, then, chronotopes are *normative* in that any particular chronotope encapsulates certain norms, which guide actors' social behavior, and is also loaded with different orders of morality and indexicality which make them function as sets of evaluative criteria for others' behavior (Blommaert, 2017; Karimzad, 2020).

An interrelated concept to chronotope is the notion of scales (Blommaert, 2015; see also Carr & Lempert, 2016; Gal, 2016). Operationally defining scales relative to chronotopes, Blommaert (2015) posits that if chronotopes are “invokable chunks of history that organize the indexical order of discourse”, then scales are “the scope of communicability of such invocations” (p. 105). Chronotopes, thus, operate at different scale levels; that is, they are organized within and across a scalar system which determines their scope of recognizability and communicability (Blommaert, 2015). The scalar organization of chronotopes can be conceptualized in two dimensions, i.e. horizontal and vertical, depending on whether the focus is on the scope of distribution or the hierarchical value and unequal accessibility. The horizontal dimension of scale has to do with the spread and scope of the chronotopes; that is, how ‘widespread’ or ‘local’ they are or, to put it in ‘scalar’ terms, whether they are larger-scale or smaller-scale. On the other hand, the vertical dimension determines the distinction value of the chronotopes; that is, how ‘dominant’ or ‘hegemonic’ they are, or to put it in ‘scalar’ terms, whether they are higher-scale or lower-scale (Karimzad & Catedral, 2021; see also Blommaert 2015).

To give an example here to clarify, an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom in Iran is a small-scale chronotope with its own unique social actors (the teacher and students) and

specific time and space conditions; however, it is nested within the larger- and higher-scale chronotopes of Standardness, neoliberalism, and English hegemony, as it operates according to the normativities of these chronotopes. It is important to note, therefore, that while chronotopes and scales have been discussed in different ways, throughout this dissertation I follow this conceptualization put forth by Blommaert (2015, 2017) and Karimzad and Catedral (2021). Thus, whenever invoked chronotopes are examined in discourse, the scale(s) at which they are interpretable, and actually interpreted, has to be taken into consideration in the analysis as well². Unlike other spatiotemporal approaches to the study of semiosis, which use either scale/scaling or chronotopes, this system integrates the two and through this integration allows for a more complex analysis. This is specifically what Karimzad (2021) is arguing for in his proposal of a chronotopic-scalar approach to discourse analysis that will be elaborated on in the following.

Given the analytical potential of chronotopes, many sociolinguistic notions (e.g. language ideologies, identity (work), context and contextualization, normativity, etc.) have been re-examined through a chronotopic analysis, especially in the context of globalization and mobility (e.g. Blommaert & De Fina, 2017; Catedral 2018; Dick 2010; Eisenlohr, 2015; Karimzad 2016a; Karimzad & Catedral 2018a, 2018b; Koven 2013b; Woolard, 2013). Specifically, with regard to theorizing how norms of sociolinguistic behavior are contextually (re)constructed, interpreted, organized, and dynamically changed, Karimzad (2020) introduces *chronotopes of normalcy*, viewing normalcy as “a set of scalar and chronotopic relations” (2020, p. 108; see also Blommaert 2017, 2018). In his work, he discusses normativity in terms of how social actors

² I would like to note that when I use the terms “chronotopes” and “scales”, I do not mean them as static and fixed notions; in fact, they are products of chronotopization processes and scaling processes. However, following Karimzad & Catedral (2021), when I am discussing the “general properties of chronotopes” (p. 23), I use the terms chronotopes and scales, but when my focus is on the “actual discursive practices” (p. 23), I use the terms chronotopization and scaling.

develop images of what counts as ‘normal’ sociolinguistic/semiotic behavior, particularly language choice, across their socialization (read chronotopization) trajectories and how these images of normalcy are chronotopic in that they are situated within specific time-space configurations involving specific types of people. Karimzad’s conceptualizing of chronotopization is different from what Agha (2007) has discussed in that it not only accounts for the large-scale mass-mediated chronotopes, that are discursively constructed, but also discusses smaller-scale lived chronotopes that are constructed through social actors’ first-hand experiences with contexts which leads to them developing images of normalcy that are deeply semiotically detailed.

While Karimzad (2020) does mention that through chronotopization processes images of normativity are developed with regard to not only language choice but *all levels of semiosis*, it is in his later work (Karimzad, 2021) that he specifically further extends his idea of chronotopic normativity to not only include normativities of context, i.e. social norms that guide and constrain behavior in each context, but also of “the linguistic/semiotic resources that make meaning-making *from* and *about* these contexts possible.” (2021, p. 7). He discusses how regularities/normativities of *texts* come to be linked to regularities/normativities of *contexts* and how these links are chronotopic in that “the relationship between the indexicals and the objects and relations they point to are recognized and enregistered—and are subsequently utilized—*within* and *in relation to* particular time–space arrangements” (2021, p. 7-8). Karimzad here adds to his theorization of normativity by discussing how based on the availability and accessibility of chronotopic input, i.e. what social/interactional contexts actors encounter in their socialization histories and at what scales of relevance, social actors come to develop chronotopic images of normalcy with varying levels of semiotic detail, or with varying levels of *resolution*. To

conceptualize this idea of chronotopic resolution, he argues for a chronotopic-scalar approach that can capture and unpack the fractal³ connections across the differently scaled chronotopes. Chronotopic resolution, he maintains, additionally allows researchers to account for the social actors' "differential familiarity with the complexities of semiosis associated with particular chronotopic contexts" (p. 8), and how "social actors differ in terms of not only what chronotopes are available in their repertoires but also the level of semiotic-indexical detail linked to them" (p. 8).

I argue that such close attention to the notion of resolution, and its impact on the differential accessibility of certain images of normalcy, becomes essential in investigating social media communication. In a space that is characterized by multisemioticity, complexity, and trans-locality/nationality⁴, it is insightful to examine why a message gets accurately interpreted by some users, while misinterpreted or not understood at all by others; and more importantly, how/why do SM users employ different discursive strategies to create such messages. Therefore, in this dissertation, I study, through a chronotopic-scalar lens, how identity performances and meaning-making processes on social media are guided by SM users' understandings of normativities, of text and of context. Specifically, I focus on different types of linguistic/semiotic data on different social media platforms to examine the processes through which '(migrant-)Iranianness' and specific (trans-)national identities get to be performed, negotiated, and evaluated online. I show how through drawing on differently-scaled normative images that are chronotopic in nature, SM users perform their own (migrant-)Iranian identities, create idealized

³ The idea behind this 'fractality' of chronotopic images comes from how differently scaled chronotopes are linked through fractal connections where orders of indexicality from higher scales get projected onto 'infinitely detailed' lower-scale chronotopes and thus "we see chronotopes nested within chronotopes" (Blommaert 2017:97; cf. Irvine & Gal, 2000).

⁴ By trans-locality/nationality here I am referring to the movement of information and resources in online spaces and how they connect social actors that are physically in a variety of locales (see Kytölä, 2016).

images of ‘(migrant-) Iranianness’ and evaluate others’ identities through the lens of these idealized images. I further demonstrate how normativities of semiosis at different levels, including orthography, phonology, language choice, etc., come to be indexically linked to the normative images of ‘(migrant-)Iranianness’. In this sense, then, besides discussing the chronotopic organization of normativity, I also discuss the chronotopic organization of ‘language’, and semiotics in general, at a variety of levels and the indexical interconnections between the two. I ultimately demonstrate that a chronotopic-scalar approach, with key notions of (re-)chronotopization and resolution, is a comprehensive framework to analyze language and communication in globalization in that it takes different conceptualization of chronotopes and scales into consideration.

1.3. Iranians on Social Media

Globalization and the new technologies have deeply impacted social actors’ communication all over the world, and Iran and Iranians are no exception. For the purposes of this project, I categorize Iranian SM users, the majority of whom, not surprisingly, belong to younger generations⁵, into two groups: 1) those residing in Iran and 2) those who live abroad (including 1st- and 2nd- generation migrants⁶).

Within Iran, the Internet penetration rate has been significantly and continuously on the rise over the last decade, and especially since the Green Movement in 2008 with users most active on three online spheres: blogospheres, social networking sites or social media, and news

⁵ It should be noted that while finding statistical and demographic information in online research is difficult due to a variety of challenges and limitations (e.g. data sharing policies, censorship and filtering, anonymity, etc.), my ethnographic observations have shown that the majority of the population I am focusing on is between 20-40 years old.

⁶ For the purposes of this dissertation, given its large scope of online communication across numerous locales, the specific ‘destination’ country is usually not very relevant and will not be highlighted unless necessary and important to the analysis. ‘migrant Iranian’ is therefore used to refer to Iranians who, themselves or their parents, have left Iran with plans to stay in another country permanently or for a prolonged duration (with no return time/date in mind).

and information platforms (Honari, 2015). Among social media platforms, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are the most popular⁷. People use these platforms to follow certain topics of interest or people/celebrities on a local, national or trans-national scale, share their opinions, keep in touch with friends and family and share ‘snapshots’ of their lives with them or with a more general public, etc. On the other hand, migrant Iranians, especially the ‘younger’ 1st-generation migrants who can be put under the more recent ‘educational/skilled worker’ migration wave⁸, use these platforms to keep up with the events that go on ‘back home’ and sometimes they find communication over these platforms as the most efficient way to stay in touch with their families and friends in Iran (see Karimzad & Catedral, 2018a). Moreover, many 2nd-generation migrant Iranians⁹, specifically the children of ‘older’ 1st-generation migrants whose parents could be put under the ‘post-revolution’ migration wave¹⁰, also engage with these spaces in an attempt to familiarize themselves with their ‘Iranian roots’, build a sense of collectivity as a community, and make sense of their experiences in diaspora (see for example Alinejad, 2011, 2013, 2017).

As online communication, in general, has been characterized by the emergence of sociolinguistic/semiotic complexity, heterogeneity, and creativity (Eisenstein, 2013), among Iranian Internet users, too, a variety of new and creative communicative practices¹¹ have emerged with the rise of online interaction, and especially on social media. These include, in the

⁷ It is worth noting that Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are blocked by the Iranian government, however, Iranians use a variety of VPN services and anti-filter software to bypass the filtering and keep participating in these platforms. The censorship issue will be discussed in more detail later and where relevant to the analysis.

⁸ See Chapter 2 for information about contemporary migration waves from Iran.

⁹ Throughout the dissertation, ‘2nd generation migrant Iranians’ refers to children of 1st generation Iranian migrants that were either born outside of Iran or left Iran at a young age.

¹⁰ See Chapter 2 for information about contemporary migration waves from Iran.

¹¹ It is worth noting that while many of these new practices can be considered markers of youth culture, they can also be perceived as ‘iconoclastic’ and ‘anti-tradition’ by many and thus negatively evaluated due to their non-standardness and ‘impureness’; these stances and evaluations will be discussed in the analysis chapters.

broadest sense, specific orthographic norms (e.g. ‘Finglish’ which is writing Farsi words with Roman alphabet, or the ‘reversed Finglish’ which is writing English words with Farsi alphabet), specific Farsi-English and English-Farsi code-switches (e.g. ‘friend’, ‘relationship’, ‘fucked-up’, ‘mehmoonī’ (=gathering, party), etc.), neologisms (e.g. ‘rel zadan’ which comes from the English word ‘relationship’ and the Farsi verb ‘zadan’ meaning ‘to hit’ referring to making your relationship with your partner social-media-official), as well as other visual and multimedia devices such as memes, stickers, emojis, etc. Not surprisingly, many of these new practices are heavily influenced by the English language, as well as American pop culture, due to globalization and mobility and the general popularity of English as the ‘language of the Internet’. Therefore, some brief explanation on the status of English, and more generally hegemonic language ideologies, in Iran and among Iranians is in order here.

Farsi/Persian is Iran’s sole official and ‘national’ language. Since in the modern history of Iran, Farsi has been used as a ‘unifying’ tool to build a nation-state (see Chapter 2), it is closely associated with Iranian nationality, culture, and identity. Farsi literature and ‘grammar’ are taught in school as compulsory subjects in all levels pointing to the importance of the language as an essential part of being ‘Iranian’. English as an International language, on the other hand, has always been associated with prestige and high status among Iranians, providing them with a higher symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) than Farsi (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016)¹². This is, of course, in line with the hegemonic power of English in globalization and its perceived value in the global market (Park 2011; Park & Wee, 2013). Additionally, English as the ‘global’ lingua franca is at its full force in the trans-local/-national context of the Internet, and specifically social media, as it connects users from different locales together and helps them interact with one

¹² This statement most definitely applies to Iranians within Iran. Regarding migrant Iranians, however, the situation might be more complex depending on the linguistic dynamics in the ‘host’ country.

another and with discourses. This can easily be seen in its prevalence on different social media platforms. In the case of 1st- and 2nd-generation Iranians abroad, too, the above-mentioned language ideologies play out in different ways through their positionings and practices with regard to ethnolinguistic identifications, heritage language maintenance and development, family language policies, standard English as commodity, English as the ‘language of Internet’, and more (see for instance Ghandchi, 2019; Gharibi & Seals, 2020; Malek, 2021). Any study of Iranians’ online sociolinguistics, thus, requires paying careful attention to Farsi and English languages, and scripts, and the ideologies associated with these. A detailed background can be found in Chapter 2 of the dissertation.

1.4. Significance of Research

This dissertation has theoretical, methodological, and empirical implications and as such contributes to different aspects of the scholarship on sociolinguistics of normativity, online sociolinguistics, and sociolinguistics of mobility.

On a theoretical and methodological level, the study theorizes online communication through a chronotopic-scalar lens. Given the complex nature of online interaction and the fact that only recently have scholars started adopting chronotope to analyze online communication (see for example Procházka 2018), the study will add to this line of research by illustrating and emphasizing the utility of a chronotopic-scalar analysis in such work. Specifically, I analyze and theorize online polycentricity or polynormativity (Blommaert, 2018; see also Androutsopoulos & Lexander, 2021) at a variety of semiotic levels demonstrating how participants draw on their chronotopic, rather than merely linguistic, repertoires to construct and negotiate certain normative images of (migrant-)Iranianness, create idealized images of a ‘good’ (migrant-)Iranian, and argue for and/or against certain non-standard online linguistic norms indexically

linking them to ideal images of a ‘good’ Iranian. Moreover, while chronotopes have recently been used in analyzing online discourse by some researchers (e.g. Koven & Marques, 2015; 2017), there has not been a focus on the argumentative nature (Blommaert, 2019; Karimzad & Catedral, 2018b) of online chronotopic work. This argumentative nature, I argue, can be investigated within a chronotopic-scalar framework and particularly through adopting the notion of chronotopic resolution. That is, through taking into account the scales at which certain chronotopes are interpretable and the accessibility of these scales to different SM users, I illustrate the power ‘moves’ in the interactions by manipulating the accessibility of chronotopes invoked. I also argue that a chronotopic-scalar analysis not only helps provide a detailed analysis of online sociolinguistic phenomena but also allows us to account for different and sometimes conflicting polycentric orientations in evaluating normative behavior.

Additionally, through investigating semiotic processes that are unique to social media platforms due to their technological affordances (e.g. creating/adapting/sharing memes), this dissertation also aims to explore and elaborate on how social media have become a space where identities are agentively and creatively negotiated and where certain ideologies are reproduced and widely circulated. The dissertation, thus, adds to the scholarship on multimodal communication and multisemioticity (Leppänen & Kytölä, 2016) as well as the studies on grassroots agency in the era of vernacular globalization (Appadurai, 1996). I specifically discuss the resemiotization and recontextualization (Iedema, 2003; Leppänen et al. 2014) processes that are key in meaning-making in social media interaction and underscore how the tools provided by a chronotopic-scalar approach help accurately trace the pathways (Wortham & Reyes, 2020) of resemiotization within and across online as well as offline contexts and capture the multi-layeredness of meaning in online interactions. Through underlining the importance of

investigating multimedia and multisemiotic data, rather than focusing on linguistic data only, I also demonstrate and analyze in detail how social media leads to more bottom-up, creative, and polycentric forms of agency. Along similar lines, through offering an account that takes into consideration the links across online and offline chronotopes and/or scales in analyzing online communication, the study examines the dialogic nature of online and offline spaces contributing to the research on the online-offline *nexus* (Blommaert, 2018).

Finally, the study's contribution to the scholarship on sociolinguistics of mobility is that it broadens understandings of transnationality in a way that it includes not only contexts of migration and 'movement' of people, but also seemingly 'local' contexts like Iran. This need for a broader understanding of transnationality that goes beyond migration contexts has been recently discussed by some scholars (see for example Canagarajah, 2017). Through focusing on migrant as well as non-migrant SM users' communication on social media, I show how by the virtue of participating in social media, each social actor is 'transnational'. Specifically, I demonstrate how migrant and non-migrant Iranians find a space on social media to engage in identification processes that are transnational in nature and also find an opportunity to *collectively* construct, circulate, and reproduce certain ideologies and normative images of (migrant-)Iranianness. In a sense, my analysis sheds light on how transnationality and cultural hybridity (e.g. Pennycook, 2006; see also Tetreault, 2015) are linked on social media communication as there is a vast accessibility of various transnational 'images' to seemingly 'non-mobile' people which they use in their meaning-making and identification processes. I particularly show, through a chronotopic-scalar lens, that the general accessibility of these 'images' is not a guarantee for their uniform interpretation and adoption as this accessibility is filtered by the 'resolution' of these images, i.e. the semiotic details associated with the image in

the actors' repertoires, and what they index when interpreted at a certain scale. Therefore, the (digital) polycentricity that I discuss in this dissertation by looking at both 'mobile' and 'non-mobile' users adds more nuance and complexity to the general polycentricity that has been discussed in studies of transnationality, i.e. simultaneous orientations to both 'home' and 'host' countries (see for example Catedral, 2018).

On an empirical level, by focusing on Iranians in Iran and in diaspora¹³, the study will provide an insightful understanding of the sociolinguistics of an understudied population. Particularly, the investigation of Iranians' online sociolinguistic practices is of significant empirical value for the following reasons. First, the bulk of the research on the sociolinguistics of Iran has been focused on their practices in offline contexts and mostly in immigrant communities (e.g. Karimzad, 2016a). There have been some studies looking at Iranians on social media but the majority of these have mainly concerned themselves with politics and political activism (e.g. Rahimi, 2011; Wojcieszak & Smith 2014) with a few exceptions that look into the social and cultural aspects (e.g. Faris & Rahimi, 2015). With regard to the studies on migrant Iranians' online activities, there have been a few but these were mostly focused on 2nd generation Iranians' activities on blogospheres and not on the type of social media widely used today (e.g. see for example Alinejad, 2017). More importantly, the online 'dialogue' between migrant and non-migrant Iranians has not been a focus of any of the studies on Iranian sociolinguistics. In this dissertation, I offer a detailed account of how Iranians, migrant and non-migrant, perform their (trans-)national identities online in their discussions of (migrant-)Iranianness and how together they evaluate other Iranians' identities on social media platforms. Moreover, my research

¹³ Throughout the dissertation, I use the term 'diaspora' not necessarily as 'forced migration' or 'exile' but as a "state of being away from one's home(land) in a 'foreign' land". There is a specific Farsi word ("ghorbat") that is commonly used by people to refer to this state and the way that I use 'diaspora' in my work is closest to this Farsi notion.

contributes to the scholarship on Iranians' online communication as it focuses on social actors' linguistic/semiotic practices and demonstrates their chronotopic organization and indexical links to perceptions of normativity. This is particularly insightful due to the sociolinguistic/semiotic hybridity and heterogeneity of online communication and the need for such research among Iranian Internet users.

1.5. Research Questions

To investigate the ways in which (migrant-)Iranianness and (trans-)nationality is negotiated on social media by Iranians in and outside of Iran and trace how understandings of sociosemiotic normativity plays out in these online interactions, I focus on three main questions as follows:

1. How do Iranian SM users' understandings of normativity, of context and of text, inform and guide their constructions of '(migrant-)Iranianness'?
 - 1.1. What normative images do they invoke through their semiotic and multimodal practices, specifically in memes, to construct their migrant-Iranian identity? And how are these images chronotopically organized?
 - 1.2. What are the specific spatiotemporally-situated personhoods created in these 'meme'ing practices and how are they enregistered through indexical links between certain forms (specifically *lexical* and *phonological* norms) and certain normative images of migrant-Iranianness?
 - 1.3. What does studying such online semiotic practices through a chronotopic approach reveal about the increased agency and creativity in identity work in the era of Internet and social media?
2. How do Iranian SM users' understandings of normativity, of context and of text, guide their moral and normative evaluations of '(migrant-)Iranianness' at a 'transnational' scale?

- 2.1. What normative images do they invoke in their evaluations of certain (migrant-)Iranians in a viral video? And how are these images chronotopically organized?
- 2.2. How do they construct a spatiotemporally situated personhood in their evaluations through creating and enregistering indexical links between certain forms (specifically *phonological* norms) and certain idealized images of (migrant-)Iranianness?
- 2.3. How do their moral evaluations converge or diverge depending on whether or not they are migrants and how can both the convergence and the divergence be explained using the notion of chronotopic resolution?
- 2.4. What does studying such online semiotic processes through a chronotopic approach add to our understandings of transnationality in the era of Internet and social media?
3. How do Iranian SM users' understandings of normativity, of context and of text, guide their moral and normative evaluations of 'Iranianness' at a 'national'/'local' scale?
 - 3.1. What chronotopes do they invoke through their linguistic/semiotic practices and metacommentaries to indexically link certain forms (specifically *orthographic* norms) to certain normative images of 'Iranianness'?
 - 3.2. What are the iconic images of personhood that are constructed through these chronotopic processes and how do they guide users' identity performances?
 - 3.3. What does studying such online semiotic processes through a chronotopic approach reveal about the argumentative nature of online identity work?

In investigating these questions, I draw on scholarship of sociolinguistics of mobility and globalization as well as sociolinguistics of social media. Each analysis chapter will answer one of these main questions by focusing on a different case study of Iranian SM users' interaction on social media. These case studies are different yet relevant as they collectively provide a

comprehensive and multifaceted picture of how different forms of ‘(migrant-)Iranianness’ are constructed, evaluated, and negotiated through online multisemiotic practices and positionings guided by chronotopic understandings of sociolinguistic normativity.

1.6. Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 2: Background

In this chapter, I provide an ethnographically grounded and contextualized background of the quality and extent of Iranians’ participation on social media in both Iran and diaspora. I also discuss the sociohistorical context of contemporary (since mid 1970s) migration from Iran. Since my focus is on sociolinguistic normativity and different identification processes, I also elaborate on the linguistic dynamics in Iran, and ideologies among Iranians, with regard to its official language, Farsi (or Persian), and the most popular foreign language, also deemed as the ‘international’ language, English¹⁴. Finally, I briefly explain the situation of social media within Iran specifically with regard to filtering restrictions and censorship.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter includes my situating of the study within the broader scholarship of sociolinguistics of mobility as well as online sociolinguistics with particular attention to issues of normativity, multisemioticity, and identification. After discussing the common theories and methodologies used in these fields, I elaborate on the theoretical framework and analytical toolkit that this dissertation is based on. I specifically delve deep into the concepts of chronotopes, scales, and the utility of a chronotopic-scalar approach in studying online communication.

¹⁴ While acknowledging the linguistic diversity of Iran, I will not be talking about the different minority languages spoken in Iran since it is beyond the scope of my dissertation and research focus.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter is focused on the detailed description, and justification, of the data collection and analysis procedures that are used for this research. I elaborate on the social media platforms I chose to closely examine and describe how and over what timeline I collected the data over and across these platforms. I also discuss the details of my ethnographic work in online and offline spaces throughout this project. With regard to the analysis, I will explain and justify my theoretical-analytical tools and the specifics of the ethnographically-grounded discourse analytic approach I take to analyzing the data.

Chapter 5: Multisemioticity and Performing Migrant-Iranianness through Internet memes

In this chapter, I focus on multi-semiotic identity work through a specific genre of Iranian memes I call the ‘diaspora’ memes that are made by migrant Iranians for a migrant Iranian online audience. I present several memes collected from Instagram along with their detailed analyses. Analyzing different semiotic aspects of these memes, I examine what differently-scaled chronotopes of normalcy the meme creators/adaptors invoke and combine within the meme-frame to construct transnational identities. I also analyze how certain normative images of migrant-Iranianness are constructed through creating and enregistering indexical links between certain phonological/lexical norms and certain identities. In addition, I analyze other SM users’ comments on these memes to examine the audience uptake and whether or not they found the memes ‘relatable’ and discuss these using the notions of chronotopization and chronotopic resolution.

Chapter 6: ‘Accent’ and Evaluating (Migrant-)Iranianness on YouTube

In this chapter, I delve into more online chronotopic identity work by focusing on how SM users distance themselves from certain (migrant-)Iranian identities that they portray as ‘bad’ (migrant-

)Iranians. I focus on a music video by an Iranian make-up/fashion model and artist, who recently left Iran and now lives in the UAE, that went viral on YouTube and across other social media platforms allegedly due to the artists' 'bad' English. My data and analysis for this chapter are focused on a specific genre of YouTube videos, i.e. 'reaction videos', that evaluate this music video and the migrant and non-migrant SM users' reactions to these reaction videos. I demonstrate how the situation of online virality along with the users' chronotopization histories leads to the construction of an idealized image through the lens of which the artist is portrayed as a 'bad' (migrant-)Iranian. Focusing on the same phonological norms discussed in Chapter 5, I show the chronotopic organization of sociolinguistic norms.

Chapter 7: Orthography and Constructing/Contesting the image of a 'good' Iranian

In the last analysis chapter, I illustrate more explicitly the polycentricity and the argumentative nature of online chronotopic identity work through focusing on debates around a new highly controversial online nonstandard Farsi orthographic norm (unanimously called 'hekasreh' by SM users) on Twitter. I present several tweets (mostly in the form of textual data but sometimes including multimodal data) along with their detailed analyses focusing on the chronotopic-scalar connections that indexically link orthography and national identity. I discuss how in their positionings for or against this new orthographic norm SM users construct *and* contest an idealized image of a 'good' Iranian and demonstrate the utility of a chronotopic-scalar approach in capturing the nuances of these interactions.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

In the final chapter, I summarize the findings and arguments that were discussed in chapters 5 through 7 and elaborate on how the three case studies complement one another, theoretically and empirically, and collectively account for how chronotopic understandings of normativities guide

social actors' online interactions in the context of globalization and mobility. I discuss the contributions and implications of this study for the scholarship on sociolinguistics of mobility and online sociolinguistics and also point out the limitations of the study. I conclude the chapter by laying out some potential future directions that this research can take.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

2.1. Overview

In this chapter, I first discuss the ideologies associated with the most widely spoken language and the most important foreign language in Iran, i.e. Farsi/Persian and English respectively, giving a brief history of the importance of these two languages in the sociolinguistic scene of Iran. I then lay out the Iranians' migration patterns in the past fifty years to offer some information on the very general demographics of the current 'Iranian diaspora'. I focus on how (trans-)national identities interact with language ideologies and finally move on to providing a picture of the online, and specifically social media, communication dynamics among Iranians in Iran and abroad.

2.2. Mono-/Multi-lingualism and National Identity in Iran

2.2.1. Farsi/Persian¹⁵ as the official language

Persian belongs to the Indo-European language family and has in its long history been in contact situations with a variety of languages the most salient of which is Arabic since after the Arabs' Islamic conquest in the 7th century AD. For this reason, modern Persian includes numerous Arabic loanwords and the script is a modified version of Arabic script. Despite the ethnolinguistic diversity of Iran, the only official language is Persian or Farsi. Following the one-nation-one-language ideology, Article 15 of the current Iranian Constitution reads:

The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian.

Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this

language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and

¹⁵ Throughout this section, I use 'Persian' to refer to the language due to the preference of this term in the sources that are cited here. For the rest of the dissertation, however, 'Farsi' is used to refer to the language unless it is directly quoted from the data or other sources.

mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian.¹⁶

Having the role as the only official language, then, Persian is the sole language that must be used in the areas of administration, mass media, publication, and education (Bani-Shoraka, 2008). In education, Persian literature and Persian ‘grammar’ are two separate subjects that are taught in school in all levels and the medium of instruction is also, although not explicitly mentioned in Article 15, mostly Persian (see Sheyholislami, 2012). In schools, besides the language being taught, the attitudes about the language, its high national prestige, and its importance in socioeconomic success, are also instilled.

Persian has long been associated with nationalism and considered an essential part of the ‘Iranian’, or some might say ‘Persian’¹⁷, identity. Although it was declared as the sole official language of the country in 1906 (Abrahamian, 2008), it was especially in the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979) that systematic efforts were made into institutionalizing Persian and promoting ‘purist’ ideologies (Bani-Shoraka, 2005; Mirvahedi, 2019). The first ruler in the Dynasty, Reza Shah, who was inspired by Turkey’s Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s (1881-1938) nationalistic

¹⁶ Retrieved from https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

¹⁷ An important note to be made here is the distinction between ‘Persian’ and ‘Iranian’ and the way they are commonly used when one wants to refer to the nationality in English. In Farsi, the words for Persian (Fars) and Iranian (Irani) are two different words and all Iranians refer to their nationality as “Irani”. In English, however, there are many people who would prefer the word ‘Persian’ to ‘Iranian’ when referring to their nationality. Technically, Persian is an ethnicity and Iranian is the nationality/citizenship. That is to say there are many ethnic minorities like Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, Arabs, etc. within Iran that are not Persian but identify as Iranian. Using Persian to refer to nationality, therefore, excludes these minorities. There is, however, more complexity to the situation as many people unknowingly use the word ‘Persian’ for ‘Iranian’ for other reasons and not to intentionally follow ethnonationalist ideas. Daha (2011) discusses how 82% of her fifty-five Iranian-American participants self-identified as Persian and only 2% identified as Iranian. She discusses the possible reasons, revealed in interviews she conducted with the participants, to be connections to a glorified past (i.e. the Persian empire) and disassociating from the current regime, negative associations with Iran in the Western media and politics, and stereotypical remarks, among others. My own ethnographic observation is in line with Daha (2011) for both 1st- and 2nd- generation migrants and even non-migrants when they use English. Throughout this dissertation, I use ‘Iranian’ to refer to the national identity; however, because the SM users themselves most commonly use the word ‘Persian’, rather than ‘Iranian’, I do not change this word when it is mentioned in the data itself.

policies, embarked on his own nation-building project to turn the ethnolinguistically heterogenous Iran into a centralized homogenous nation. Persian was an essential element of this project. Through several measures, such as mandating Persian as the only language in public spheres, requiring all non-Persians to learn and use the language as the language of the nation, prohibiting the written form of any non-Persian language, and establishing the Iranian Academy for language ‘purification’¹⁸ purposes, Reza Shah established Persian as the ‘unifying’ language that all people of Iran must know and speak (for a more elaborate history see Mirvahedi, 2019).

This close association of Persian with nationalistic ideologies has continued in the post-1979- revolution era as well but in a different way. First, the government has a more tolerance-based approach to the minority languages; that is, although the language policies are still assimilationist, there is some more leniency regarding the use of minority languages (see Article 15 above). Additionally, the government’s religious affiliations on the one hand and its anti-Western rhetoric (see below) on the other have led to different forms of language planning. While the ‘Iranian Academy’ that was founded in 1935 is still operating under the name of “فرهنگستان زبان و ادب فارسی”, i.e. the Academy of Persian language and literature, its approach to Persian has changed. Take the following excerpt from the “about the academy” page on the Academy’s official website as an example:

نظر به اینکه زبان فارسی، زبان دوم عالم اسلام و کلید بخش عظیمی از ذخایر ارزشمند علمی و ادبی تمدن اسلامی، و خود از ارکان هویت فرهنگی ملت ایران است، و با توجه به اینکه بنابر اصل پانزدهم قانون اساسی جمهوری اسلامی ایران، زبان مذکور، زبان رسمی و مشترک ملت ایران است (...)¹⁹

¹⁸ Purification of a language can be defined as the ideologically-loaded act of getting rid of “putative foreign elements or other elements held to be undesirable” (Brunstad, 2003, p. 52) to maintain/preserve a language.

¹⁹ Retrieved from <https://apll.ir/درباره/> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

With regard to the fact that Farsi language is the second language of the Islamic world and the key to a large part of the invaluable scientific and literary sources of the Islamic civilization, and itself is one of the pillars of the cultural identity of the Iranian nation, and given the fact that per Article 15 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the above-mentioned language is the official language and the lingua franca of the Iranian nation (...) ²⁰

Note that this is the first sentence on the “about” page of the academy. We see that the role of Persian as a “language of the Islamic world” is foregrounded from the very beginning and even before the mentioning of national and cultural identity. Therefore, while Persian is explicitly mentioned as the official language of Iran and the lingua franca of its nation, it is first and foremost “the second language of the Islamic world and the key to a large part of the invaluable scientific and literary sources of the Islamic civilization”. This is in stark contrast with the Academy’s pre-revolution approach where Persian was underlined as the essential key of Persianness and purification processes were done in large part to ‘rid’ Persian from Arabic influence. Currently, Persian is considered by the government as the essential part of the “Islamic Iranian identity”. This difference in ideologies can be observed in the Academy’s practices: while Arabic influence on Persian is tolerated, Western influence, especially influence from English, is not, and the purification practices target more Western languages²¹ (Sanei, 2018; see also Karimzad & Sibgatullina, 2018).

²⁰ English translations are mine.

²¹ One of the tasks of the Academy, for instance, is to come up with neologisms from Persian roots for words that are coming from Western countries, and especially English words (e.g. “computer” is changed to رایانه which comes from the Middle Persian (i.e. Pahlavi) root that means “to arrange/organize”). There are mixed attitudes about these neologisms among Iranians, but based on my observation, there seems to be more resistance towards using the neologisms viewing them as ‘unnatural’, ‘anachronistic’, and ‘unnecessary’.

Besides the religious affiliation, this approach to language planning is also due to the government's general anti-Western ideological system. Post 1979 Islamic revolution, anti-Western ideologies have been observed in the government's sociopolitical, cultural, and economic discourses (KhosraviNik, 2015; Pesaran, 2008) where overt affiliations with the West and its policies are avoided and discouraged and resistance against the 'cultural invasion' of the West is encouraged (Fazeli, 2006). Although English, as a 'carrier' of Western values and Western culture, has always been approached with pessimism and caution in the top-down policies, the era of globalization and the necessity of participating in a global neoliberal marketplace has made the government face a dilemma (Karimzad, 2018). In addition, the anti-Western rhetoric, while accepted and followed by some, has also always received a bottom-up backlash from others who express concerns of 'being left behind' in times of globalization and technology. Specifically, English is associated with 'modernity', 'progressive-ness' and 'cosmopolitanism' among Iranians. More recently, with the emergence of the Internet and the prevalence of online communication and 'transnational' access to information on one hand, and intensified mobility and migration on the other, Iranians' interest in learning and using English has dramatically increased. Therefore, while Iranians still associate Persian with the Iranian identity, by for instance taking pride in Persian literature and/or making efforts to preserve the language, both the people and the government, albeit hesitantly in the case of the latter, see English as necessary in the global market. In the following section, I elaborate on the current status of English in Iran.

2.2.2. English as the global/international language

In an era of globalization, English being the most popular foreign language choice should not come as a surprise. With respect to its status in Iran, English is regarded as an 'International

language’ and a tool that provides access to information (Kiany et al., 2011). In public education, English is taught as a compulsory subject in schools starting from grade seven. However, due to the inefficiency and the focus on the Grammar-Translation method education in the public sector, most Iranians resort to private language institutes to gain communicative skills (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016; Zarrabi & Brown, 2017). In fact, it is common practice for (upper)middle-class families to send their children to language institutes around the same time they start school. English in Iran, thus, has long been associated with (upper)middle-classness and switching to English has been taken up to fulfill acts of differentiation and to index power and distance (see Karimzad, 2016b).

There is a myriad of motivations leading Iranians to learn English some of the most important of which are improving their professional careers, obtaining a better social status, enjoying the benefits of having access to the international community, and migration (Ardavani & Durrant, 2015). Specifically, with the last two motivations, i.e. access to international community and migration, the role of English in mobility and in transnational participation should be discussed. First, in the Internet era and given the fact that English is the leading language online²² and that access to information, people, and content is filtered by how proficient one is in English, more and more people come to see English as a necessity in their daily life. Therefore, while English had always enjoyed an unmatched popularity in Iran, in comparison to other foreign languages, the recent decade has seen a ‘boom’ in English language use and visibility through the Internet and social media and with the widespread use of smart mobile devices. English has moved beyond the language classroom and has entered people’s everyday interactions creating an increased interest in embarking on formally learning it. From another

²² See <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

perspective, English, a once-rare commodity that only certain people with resources could have access to, has become more accessible through online resources and classes. Today, switching to English mid-sentence or using certain English expressions while speaking Farsi among Iranians within Iran is a frequent incident that one might see both on- and off-line. This new form of accessibility has of course added to the complexity of the sociolinguistic dynamics in Iran the unpacking of which is beyond the scope of this chapter (for an example see Sanei, 2019, and Sanei, in press).

Regarding migration, English is seen as a gateway to migrate as it is the official language of many of the countries that Iranians are interested in moving to (see section 2.3 below). It is in fact customary that one of the very first steps in the immigration process in many cases is to fulfil an English proficiency requirement. ‘Educational/skilled worker’ migration in particular, which is one of the most popular forms of migration among Iranians, requires the applicants to obtain a specific score on an English standard proficiency test like TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and/or IELTS (International English Language Testing System) even if the destination country is not necessarily considered ‘English-speaking’. This is a strong force which drives Iranians into putting a large amount of time, effort, cost, and energy into learning and perfecting their English since the interest in migration has also largely increased in the past decade (see section 2.3 below). In the remaining two sections of this chapter, I first briefly discuss these migration waves and then talk about the ways Iranians in and outside of Iran use the Internet and specifically social media.

2.3. Contemporary Migration Waves from Iran (mid 1970s to 2010s)

Besides the fact that globalization is characterized by the increased mobility of people and resources, in the case of Iran and Iranians, a number of specific situations too contributed to the

increase in migration rates. The contemporary migration waves were set in motion by the sociopolitical changes that happened during and after the 1979 Islamic revolution. The first Iranian diaspora was mostly shaped by the people who left the country in the turmoil of the revolution and during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) mostly to the US, Canada, Europe, and some parts of Asia (Ardavani & Durrant, 2015; Mirvahedi, 2019). These were “mostly educated elite, political activists, intellectuals, emancipated women, people associated with the previous regime” and some who “fled the country because of the fear of being drafted to the military for the War with Iraq” (Torbat, 2002, p. 276). The second, and more recent and ongoing, migration wave²³ can be labeled as the ‘educational/skilled worker’ migration wave where young educated and skilled Iranian people leave, for mostly Western countries, in search of ‘higher-quality’ graduate-level education and job opportunities (Garousi, 2003; Mossayeb & Shirazi, 2006). Although this ‘brain drain’ had been in progress for decades (Torbat, 2002), it increased after the 2009 presidential election (Mirvahedi, 2019).

In general, the U.S. has been the leading destination for Iranian migrants. Regarding the second wave, according to a report by the Washington Institute, the number of Iranian students in the U.S., the majority of whom were enrolled in graduate programs, more than doubled between 2008 and 2012.²⁴ As reported in Honari et al. (2017), the next high ranked Western countries as destination for Iranian migrants are Germany (153,000), England (86,000), Sweden (63,000), the Netherlands (37,500), and France (15,000). A more recent map of the distribution of Iranian migrants in the countries around the world is shown in Figure 1²⁵ (the bubbles are

²³ The numerical labels that I use for the migration waves are selected for the purposes of this dissertation and might not be similar across other scholars’ work.

²⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/infographic-iranian-students-united-states> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

²⁵ Source: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-and-migrant-populations-country-origin-and-destination> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

sized relative to the estimated migrant population).

Immigrant and Emigrant Populations by Country of Origin and Destination, mid-2020 Estimates

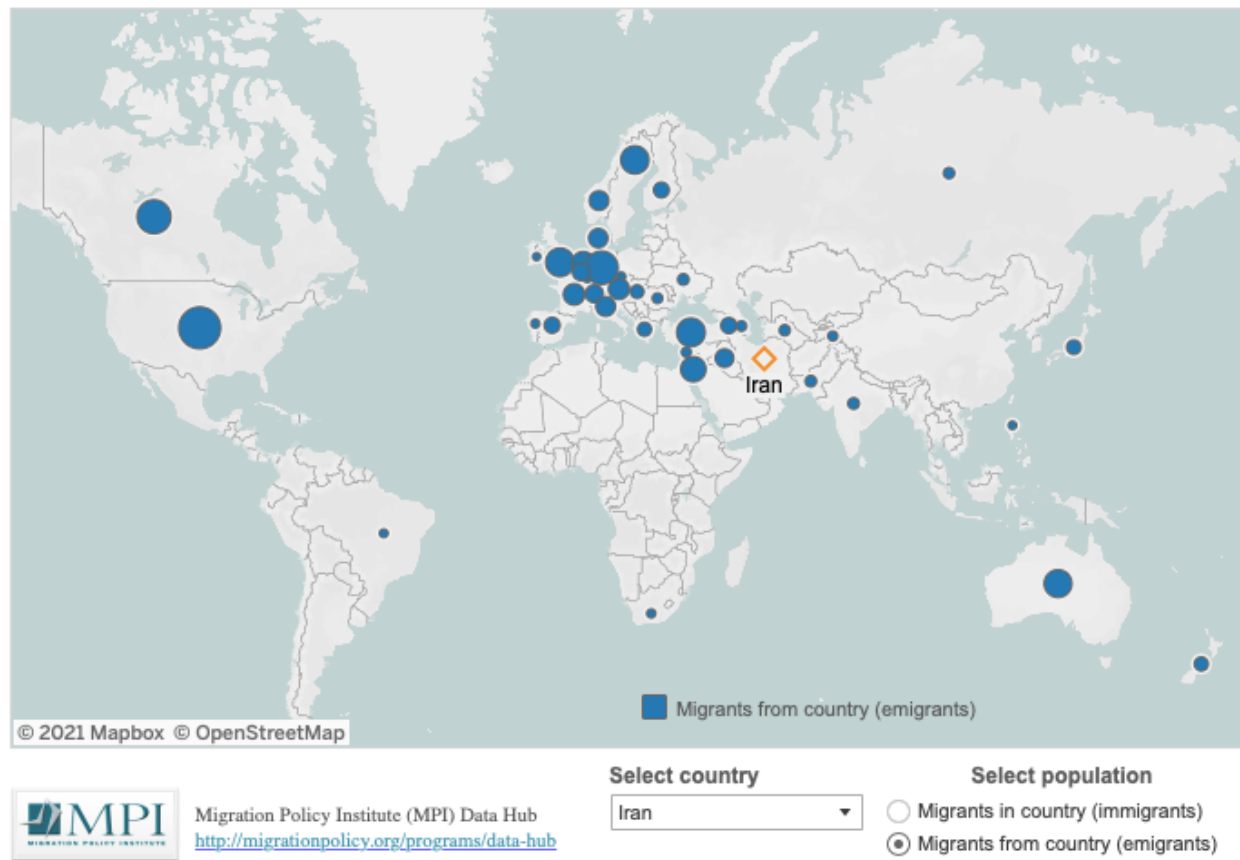


Figure 1 - Distribution of Iranian migrants around the world. From *Immigrant and Emigrant Populations by Country of Origin and Destination*, by Migration Policy Institute, n.d. (<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-and-migrant-populations-country-origin-and-destination>)

The map in Figure 1 shows that from the top six destination countries²⁶ for Iranian migrants, i.e. the U.S., Canada, Germany, England, Turkey, and Australia, four of them have English as an official language. In addition, as mentioned in section 2.2.2, specifically for the ‘educational/skilled worker’ migrants, English is a necessity in almost all of the destination countries. Besides, for all Iranian migrants, including 2nd generation ones, regardless of what

²⁶ Population estimates can be seen by hovering over the bubbles in the original source.

country they reside in English as the global lingua franca and the dominant language of the Internet is considered highly important. On the other hand, Persian is still important as a part of the national identity among the migrants. Several studies have been done on 2nd generation Iranian migrants and their 1st generation families' attempts for them to learn Persian through formal schooling or other resources for heritage language preservation purposes (see for example Ghandchi, 2019; Gharibi & Seals, 2020; Sedighi, 2018). There are few studies that focus on the second wave 1st generation young migrants' ideologies with regard to Persian, but my own ethnographic observation shows that these migrants make different attempts for cultural and national identity maintenance. An essential part of these cultural maintenance attempts is through Persian. An example of such attempts is educational migrants' creation of cultural associations in the universities and having frequent programs with the intention of cultural heritage preservation. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for instance, the Iranian Cultural Association (ICA)²⁷, which has been operating since 1988, holds weekly poetry nights where the Iranian students and other non-student community members gather and recite Persian classical and contemporary poetry and more generally engage with Persian literature.

With the rise of online communication, both Persian and English and the ideologies associated with them have become more salient in migrants' online and offline communication. Social media has become a space where migrants can play around with the linguistic resources at their disposal in their 'truncated repertoires' (Blommaert, 2010). It has also allowed for 1st and 2nd generation migrants to be exposed to contexts where the written form of the languages is used and have provided them, especially the 2nd generation, with online language learning resources and opportunities. Since this dissertation is focused on Iranians' online communication, the

²⁷ Official website can be found at <https://www.icauiuc.org> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

migrant population that is of interest are those migrants who are more active on social media. For this reason, the migrant Iranians that I focus on are either (a) the 2nd generation children of those first wave post-revolution migrants or (b) the 1st generation migrants who belong to the more recent ‘educational/skilled worker’ migration wave. In the following, the ways these migrants, as well as non-migrant Iranians within Iran, use the Internet and social media are briefly discussed.

2.4. Online Communication among Iranians

Eloranta et al. (2009) define “Iranian online social media” as:

[the] many-to-many interactive computer-mediated forms of communication through which Iranians of diverse backgrounds—in terms of class, ethnic, gender, race and sexuality, and based both in *national* and *transnational* localities—participate to circulate, exchange, share, (re)mix, and consume information, images, affects, and imaginaries of identities and sociability. (p. 21, emphasis added)

Given the focus of my dissertation, I discuss Iranians’ social media activities in two parts here. First, I give a background on how the internet have been used by Iranians within Iran and what research has been done in this regard. I then move on to the online activity of migrant Iranians, and specifically the populations that this dissertation is focusing on. I discuss the research that has been done so far and point out the gap I am attempting to bridge.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, internet penetration has been constantly increasing in the past decade in Iran. In the mid-1990s, the internet was introduced to the social life in Iran quickly after the introduction of satellite TV and cellphones. Although at the beginning of its emergence it was accessible only to a few, the internet became increasingly more accessible with time so that by the early 2000s it was on its way to becoming an established platform for a social network experience of “civic and cultural participation” (Eloranta et al., 2009, p. 26). The Iranian youth

were mostly active on blogospheres at the time and started their activities on social media later, starting with Orkut and Yahoo 360° and moving on to Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (for a more detailed historical background on Internet in Iran, see Eloranta et al., 2009). While Iranians in Iran, like many other online users, use these social media platforms to consume, produce, exchange, and share content, their case is a special one due to the government's regulatory policies with regard to social media.

For participating on several of the social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, the Iranian users must use proxies or Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to be able to bypass the blocking and filtering on these sites. This limitation might, for instance, influence the extent and type of activities on certain sites and impact the media ideologies and idioms of practice (Gershon, 2010) that users associate with these platforms. I will discuss examples of these in the analysis chapters of this dissertation and in fact by focusing on a different platform, and a different case study, in each chapter I will highlight the diversity in online practices among Iranians. Another interesting and related point is the government's "dual strategy of both expanding and controlling new media forms" (Akhavan, 2009, p. 225), which has resulted in some internal tensions in the policies as well as some inconsistencies in practices. An example can be how Twitter, which is a social media site blocked by the government, is used by many of the state officials as a platform to discuss sociopolitical matters and share opinions with other officials (e.g. through the function of tagging @) and with the public.

Due to these very complexities of the context of 'online Iran', research on Iranians' online communication must deal with some challenges specific to this context (Eloranta et al., 2009). One of these is the difficulty in obtaining accurate statistics about Iranian online users and their activities. This is in part due to the filtering processes and lack of accurate public reports,

people's unwillingness to discuss their activities on filtered sites in detail, and also the fact that because of using the anti-filter proxies, the information about the users would get distorted. Specifically, one of the ways that VPNs function is that they change the IP address of the users to show a location other than Iran so that the users can bypass the blocks. This means that even through obtaining IP address data from analytics firms, the researcher cannot accurately 'place' a user as within or outside of Iran. In this work, therefore, I demonstrate the significance and utility of multi-sited and longitudinal online ethnography (Androutsopoulos, 2006, 2008) in cases such as Iran and Iranians. There is not, however, a large body of research that uses online ethnography (for a few exceptions, see KhosraviNik, 2017; KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014), especially for studying the sociolinguistic practices of the users that reside within Iran.

With respect to the online communication of migrant Iranians, there is significant difference between the way (a) first wave post-revolution migrants, (b) their 2nd generation children, and (c) the second wave 'educational/skilled worker' migrants use internet and social media. The first wave post-revolution migrants who are more on the 'older' side²⁸ have been reported to be more active on certain well-known diaspora websites to feel connected to the 'homeland' (see for example Alinejad, 2017). Khosravi (2000), for instance, talks about how the website www.Iranian.com is used, and mostly run, by these 1st generation migrant Iranians to "(re-)produce the past" and share "nostalgia". Not surprisingly, as the majority of social media users are 'younger' people, in the case of these 1st generation migrants, they are not that active on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. In the not-very-common cases that they do participate in these online spaces, their online identities and idioms of

²⁸ An estimate can be made if we consider an 18-year-old adult who left Iran right after the revolution (1979). They would be 60 at present. Therefore, first wave migrants are mostly over 60 years old.

practice frequently get denaturalized (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) and mocked by the younger generation, i.e. their 2nd generation children²⁹.

The 2nd generation migrant Iranians participate in online spaces to ‘discover’ their Iranian roots, construct collective identities with other migrant Iranians, and make sense of their transnational experiences (see for example Alinejad, 2011, 2013, 2017). Alinejad (2017), for instance, takes an ethnographic approach studying the online, especially blogging, activities of 2nd generation Iranian-Americans in Los Angeles, “the city known for being home to the highest number of Iranians outside Iran” (p. 2), in 2008 and 2009. The 2nd generation Iranians’ more recent online communication on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, however, has not been thoroughly researched (for a number of exceptions see Elmianvari, 2019; Izadi, 2020). Online activities of this population in these spaces are of significance as they provide a ground for the creation of a unique ‘virtual Iranian diaspora’ for people who most likely felt isolated and in minority growing up in an “in-between” atmosphere of a migrant Iranian household. The internet, and social media especially, have made it possible for collective 2nd generation migrant identities to be constructed online across many countries around the world through sharing transnational experiences, frustrations, joys, and struggles as 2nd generation migrant Iranians.

Finally, the ‘younger’³⁰ first generation migrants who belong to the second wave ‘educational/skilled worker’ migration use social media to keep in touch with people ‘back home’ or with their other migrant Iranian friends who now live in other countries. Through their

²⁹ In general, this has been observed in many studies in online communication and online sociolinguistics that due to the fast pace of change in the communicative dynamics of social media, there is a generational gap. Take, for instance, how younger generation might be making fun of the way their grandparents text “as if they are writing a serious email” (for more details on media ideologies across generations see Gershon, 2010).

³⁰ As most educational/skilled worker migrants leave Iran after they finish their undergraduate studies, the age in this population ranges from 20 to 40.

activities, they share their feelings of nostalgia and longing for ‘home’ and also construct a collective ‘migrant Iranian’ identity. This population’s social media activities have not been studied at all. An exception is Karimzad and Catedral (2018a) that discusses how technology and the internet, contrary to many’s belief, have created feelings of ‘disconnectedness’ from the ‘homeland’ among Iranian and Uzbek migrants in the U.S. However, although they discuss social media activity, their data come from offline conversations and ethnography rather than online data, leaving room for research on the online communication patterns which this dissertation is aiming to do.

2.5. Summary

This chapter started with a background on Persian and English languages, the general language policies regarding them in Iran, and attitudes among Iranians inside and outside of Iran. I specifically discussed the importance of Persian as an essential part of the national identity and also highlighted the symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) of English as the language of ‘modernity’ and ‘success’ in the global marketplace as well as the gateway to ‘outside’. I then focused on the migration patterns of Iranians since mid-late 1970s to provide a general picture of the migrant population that I am interested in. In the same section, language ideologies/practices of migrant Iranians regarding Persian and English were also briefly discussed. Finally, I laid out the non-migrants’ and (different groups of) migrants’ general activity patterns online and on social media and pointed out some studies that have been done to investigate these patterns. I highlighted the gap in research and emphasized the need for the investigation of the online semiotics of Iranian social media to not only examine their sociolinguistic patterns and metacomments but also understand how language ideologies play into the identity construction online and what framework can be used to study this.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Overview

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the broader scholarship of sociolinguistics of mobility and online sociolinguistics with particular attention to issues of identification. I then elaborate on the framework that I will adopt for analysis focusing specifically on the notions of chronotopes, scales, a chronotopic-scalar approach and how these have been adopted in studies of mobility and online communication. I also discuss how this dissertation connects with these lines of scholarship.

3.2. Globalization, Transnationality, and Sociolinguistics of Mobility

The era of globalization, due to the mobility of people and resources, has brought along with it complexity and unpredictability. In Sociolinguistics in particular and in an attempt to achieve a more dynamic understanding of language in globalization, many scholars have focused on the impacts these globalization processes have on people's language use and sociolinguistic practices (Blommaert, 2003; Blommaert, 2010, Coupland, 2010; De Fina & Perrino, 2013; Jacquemet, 2005; Hall, 2014; Heller, 2003; Park & Lo, 2012; Pennycook, 2010). Blommaert (2010) points to the polycentricity and complexity of the globalized context positing that

sociolinguistic phenomena in a globalization context need to be understood as developing at several different scale-levels, where different orders of indexicality dominate, resulting in a polycentric 'context' where communicative behaviour is simultaneously pushed and pulled in various directions (p. 42).

Polycentricity, specifically, refers to how in any interactional context social behaviors, linguistic/semiotic practices included, are guided by multiple ('poly') 'centers' each with their own sets of normativities, moralities, and indexicalities. The notion, originally proposed by

Blommaert et al. (2005) in their research on multilingual practices of migrants in a number of neighborhoods in Ghent, Belgium, shows how social actors orient to different, sometimes conflicting, centers in interactions. These centers provide the actors with the criteria as to what practices are considered ‘normal’, ‘correct’, ‘appropriate’, etc. In language use specifically polycentricity can be observed through shifting between styles, registers, dialects, languages, or through employing any other indexical sign (e.g. evaluative language, or deictics that would anchor events and people in certain time-spaces) within the immediate interactional context and between the participants. The intensified mobility—of people, resources, discourses, and information—that characterizes the social phenomena in the era of globalization has made the polycentric nature of sociosemiotic behavior ever more salient. Therefore, to be able to capture the intricacies and complexities that are inherent to the sociolinguistic dynamics in the era of globalization, Blommaert (2010) suggests a paradigm shift in the study of sociolinguistics from the traditional approaches to the post-modern ones—what he calls the *sociolinguistics of mobility*. Within this post-modern paradigm, two major research areas have been of interest to researchers.

On the one hand, numerous studies have focused on the issue of mobility of people across time and space and the sociolinguistic effects of this on, especially migrant, communities. Much of the socio-cultural studies in this area have concerned themselves with immigrants’ identity construction/negotiation processes, social positionings within the context of mobility, and sociolinguistic behaviors and have adopted the concept of *transnationalism*, or *transnationality*, (Appadurai, 1996; Blommaert, 2010; Jacquemet, 2005; Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1992; Tsagarousianou, 2004; Vertovec, 2001) as the central focus of their analysis (e.g. De Fina & Perrino 2013; Duff, 2015; Hall, 2014; Park & Lo, 2012). The concept of

transnationalism/transnationality gained its popularity beginning in early 1990s where there was an “ascendancy of an approach to migration that accents the attachments migrants maintain to families, communities, traditions and causes *outside* the boundaries of the nation state to which they have moved” (Vertovec, 2001, p. 574, emphasis added). In her re-conceptualization of diaspora and diasporic communities, Tsagarousianou (2004) underscores the significance of a 'transnational' approach that would account for the “complex multidirectional flows of human beings, ideas, products -cultural and physical[-] and [the] forms of interaction, negotiation and exchange ...” (p. 64). In other words, a transnational approach makes salient the flexibility, ambiguity, and porosity of social life across clear-cut territories. As many scholars have pointed out, studying transnationalism requires critically investigating the relationship between identity and language adopting interactional and sociolinguistic analyses (see e.g. Bucholtz & Skapoulli, 2009; De Fina & Perrino 2013).

Although transnationality is more discussed in the context of migration, some scholars take a broader approach to transnationality and its interplay with language and identity. Park and Lo (2012), for example, put it this way:

A transnational perspective is not just necessary because we happen to be looking at mobile, migrant populations; it is relevant, we argue, to any consideration of sociolinguistic issues in an increasingly globalizing world. Language is an important key through which humans interpret and mediate their experiences, and thus, in an ever more interconnected world, people become compelled to engage in complex negotiations of the meaning of language to make sense of societal transformations and shifting senses of identity. This makes a more deeply historical and critical perspective on language in society a critical concern for our understanding of globalization. (p. 151)

A closely related idea to this more encompassing conceptualization of transnationalism is *trans-locality*. Translocality has to do with the connectivity between different locales (not necessarily nation-states) where the local and the global come to interact with one another to shape and reshape the socio-cultural lives of social actors (Blommaert, 2010; Hepp, 2009; Kytölä, 2016; Nederveen Pieterse, 1995). This brings us to our second major area of research in the Sociolinguistics of mobility: the Sociolinguistics of the Internet.

Recently, increasingly more studies have focused on investigating the impact of globalization and new technologies on social actors' communicative behavior and their social and cultural activities, especially on the Internet and social media (see Georgakopoulou & Spilioti 2015; Papacharissi, 2011; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). This new area of research can be understood in terms of Appadurai's (1996) *vernacular globalization*. According to Appadurai, the smaller-scale 'micronarratives', especially made possible through new technologies, "allow for modernity to be rewritten more as vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies" (p. 10). Put another way, the Internet and the affordances it offers have provided social actors with an increased agency which allows them to actively engage in more *bottom-up* globalization processes. As with globalization, vernacular globalization also is characterized by polycentricity, mobility, and complexity. Internet and especially social media, as a platform of social (inter-)action, is an epitome of this polycentric context of (vernacular) globalization.

Polycentricity of online communication, in fact, has been specifically discussed by Blommaert (2018) as he extends the idea to social media communication. As an example, he brings up Facebook updates and how within a post, one can see orientations to different "norms of literacy and linguistic codes, the genre and register norms of an 'update' (...), the tacit norms

of one's community of 'friends' regarding certain topics and ways to discuss them" (p. 50) along with Facebook's guidelines of conduct and the algorithms based on which the visibility of the posts is adjusted. In a recent work, Androutsopoulos and Lexander (2021) explore this under the term *digital polycentricity* and in a diasporic context, focusing on online and offline practices of four Senegalese-Norwegian families residing in Norway, to investigate how different diasporic identities are constructed through polycentric meaning-making processes that include the actors' both linguistic and semiotic repertoires. A related concept to the polycentricity of online interaction is what many scholars argue as the *translocality* of digital communication. Kytölä (2016), for instance, argues that digital communication being a "vastly diverse, hybrid and multisemiotic domain" (p. 375) is by definition translocal as it comprises "a variety of mediating means and technologies enabling individuals and communities to interact from a distance" (p. 375). The translocality inherent in digital communication allows the participants to "have (and display) access not only to local but also to global discourses, points of identification, or means of meaning making" (p. 382). Moreover, the increasingly multisemiotic nature of this translocal communication arena, i.e. the mixtures of audiovisual as well as linguistic resources, has made possible new forms of hybrid trans-local (and/or transnational) identities to be (co-)constructed.

In this dissertation, I bring together the two research areas of migration/transnationality and online Sociolinguistics by following constructions of (migrant-)Iranian identities and creations of idealized images of (migrant-)Iranianness online. I explore the polycentricity within the context of migration as migrants orient to a variety of different online and offline centers, including those associated with 'host' and 'home' country. I also examine how online space has created a platform for non-migrants and migrants to engage in dialogues with one another.

Additionally, I explore the polycentric orientations of non-migrants in their sociolinguistic online practices and metalinguistic discussions.

3.3. Online Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistic research on social media is constantly changing, in terms of the kinds of research questions investigated, hand in hand with the rapid change of the dynamicity of social media itself. While earlier research on social media was mostly focused on platforms such as emails, message boards, and IM (i.e. Instant Messaging) services, more recent research has been focused on Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Chiluba & Ifukor, 2015; Karimzad & Sibgatullina, 2018; Wagner, 2011; West, 2013; Zappavigna, 2011). These social media platforms differ from one another in a variety of features, including but not limited to size and type of audience, level of privacy, modes of interaction (e.g. comments, replies, retweets, etc.) and the reasons regarding their selection as the medium for communication. In general, social media, specifically SNS, create a platform for people to (co-)construct different online identities (boyd, 2014) through performing various acts of identification and ultimately creating online communities of practice. Social media, therefore, is a rich repository of sociolinguistic data due to its unique characteristics. First, it creates a context for average speakers to engage in debates specifically about language. This constant and dynamic metalinguistic engagement then becomes data for sociolinguistic scholars through which they can investigate people's sociolinguistic behaviors and the underlying ideologies that guide those behaviors without having to deal with the observer's paradox in their data collection.

Moreover, many scholars in the field maintain that, as opposed to the tendency to think of online and offline contexts as two completely separate arenas, the identities performed on the two platforms, as well as the ways in which they are performed, are not completely separate. In

fact, online and offline contexts seem to be in constant interaction with each other, shaping and reshaping one another (Blommaert, 2018; Szabla & Blommaert, 2018). This can be seen, for example, through how certain linguistic practices seep into offline contexts from online platforms and vice versa. With this online-offline *nexus* (Blommaert, 2018) in mind, therefore, it can be argued that research on social media offers an insightful understanding about the dynamics of not only the virtual world but the reality of our social lives both online and offline.

Among the sociocultural studies done on social media communication, there seem to be some areas that attract more interest among scholars. There have been numerous studies focusing on media literacies and orthography (e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2012), on users' social and political engagement (or 'activism') online (e.g. Chilwa, 2012), on migration discourses and transnationality on social media (e.g. Marques & Koven, 2017), and more recently on the affordances of specific internet devices (e.g. hashtags, emoticons, memes, etc.) in social interaction and meaning-making processes (e.g. Grundlingh, 2018). Many of these studies use different methodologies to look at issues of identity through investigating social actors' patterns of semiosis online. With regard to orthography, for example, while many earlier literacy studies focused on standard orthography, orthographic reform, and issues of identity, using mainly a top-down institutional approach (e.g. Johnson, 2000, 2002, 2012; Sebba, 2007, 2009), more recent studies have focused their research on orthography as identity work in social media contexts by examining social actors' script choice, non-standard spellings, and new orthographic practices as well as by studying their metalinguistic debates on online and offline orthography (Androutsopoulos, 2012; Drackley, 2018; Gleason, 2016; Sherman & Švelch, 2015).

In addition to orthography, the ways immigrants use the social media platforms to navigate their hybrid identities, create a sense of collectivity with other migrants, and also

connect to their ‘homeland’ has been another area where scholars have done sociocultural research (e.g. Baran, 2018; Bernal, 2006, Haynes & Wang, 2020; Koven & Marques, 2015; Marino S., 2015; Marques & Koven, 2017). Much of the research on social media migrant discourses has been focused on the ways transnational identities are negotiated, and evaluated, through the users’ simultaneous orientations to several centers, most importantly the ‘home’ and the ‘host’ country. Recently, there has been more interest among scholars to investigate (transnational) identifications that are facilitated by the technological affordances unique to social media (e.g. Leppänen & Häkkinen, 2013; Rymes, 2012). They have started to examine the unique multisemiotic Internet devices, e.g. memes, and how they are entering social actors’ semiotic repertoires on which they draw to fulfill a variety of social and interactional purposes (Georgakopoulou, 2015; Grundlingh, 2018; Marino G., 2015; Varis & Blommaert, 2015). This is close to what Rymes (2010, 2012, 2014) has referred to as *communicative repertoires*; that is, a set of ways social actors use language and other signs in meaning-making processes that “includes not only linguistic elements (and, often, multiple languages—¡sí se puede!) but also mass-mediated cultural elements, circulated, often, via viral Internet sources like videos found on YouTube” (2012, p. 216). The elements of these repertoires are “highly recontextualizable” as they can be reproduced in a variety of new contexts and obtain a ‘local’ meaning and significance. In this dissertation, I investigate different types of online data on different social media platforms to study the complex identity work of migrant and non-migrant Iranians. I trace the processes through which Iranian SM users draw on their multisemiotic communicative repertoires to authenticate their own (migrant-)Iranianness and evaluate others’. I draw attention to the complexity of these processes and the need for explanatory tools to account for this complexity.

Researching social media communication, as can be seen, requires paying careful attention to a myriad of communicative and technological aspects and multisemiotic layers due to its polycentric and translocal nature and the multiplicity of social actors. Moreover, the dialogicity of online and offline interaction adds to the complexity of online sociolinguistics. Kytölä (2016) maintains that

The investigation of translocality [of digital communication] in all its complexity seems to call for a multidisciplinary approach in which insights from ethnography, linguistics, discourse studies, sociology, social semiotics, cultural studies and communication studies (and others) can be combined to provide detailed information on the forms, patterns, functions and meanings of translocal processes and practices in digital communication.
(p. 383-384)

Therefore, in order to better understand social media and the communication that happens over and across them, especially when focusing on issues of (trans-)locality/nationality, I argue for the utility of a chronotopic-scalar approach (Karimzad, 2021). While Bakhtin's (1981) notion of *chronotope* has been adopted by many scholars in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology as an analytical tool to account for the dynamicity and complexities of sociolinguistic phenomena in the era of globalization (Agha, 2007; Blommaert & De Fina, 2017; Dick, 2010; Koven, 2013b; Woolard, 2013), only recently researchers of online sociolinguistics have started to adopt a chronotopic approach in their studies (e.g. Koven & Marques, 2017; Lyons & Tagg, 2019; Procházka, 2018; Sinatora, 2019). In the following section, I will elaborate on this concept and its interrelation with the concept of *scales* (for a detailed discussion on 'scales' see Lempert & Carr, 2016) and justify the analytical potential of these for a sociolinguistic study of social media and trans-locality/nationality.

3.4. Chronotopes, Scales, and Researching Mobility

Chronotope was originally proposed by Bakhtin (1981) in literary theory to highlight the time-space interconnectedness in novelistic discourse. The notion, however, has since been extended to the analysis of social behavior outside of the ‘story world’ as well. In this latter, more broad and empirical, application of chronotopes, they have been reconceptualized as time-space configurations peopled by certain identities or personhoods that organize social information and contextualize discourses in interaction and meaning-making (Agha 2007; Bakhtin 1981; Blommaert 2015, Silverstein, 2005). They are “chunks of history” with different “scopes of communicability” (Blommaert, 2015, p. 105) that are invoked in interaction, through indexicals such as deictics (e.g. ‘here’, ‘there’, ‘now’, ‘then’, etc.), voicing (e.g. using a recognizable ‘voice’ associated with a certain social type), code-switches (i.e. shifting between languages, styles, and registers), lexical choices, etc., to (re-)construct and construe meaning. Following this reconceptualization, and due to the analytical potential, of the notion, many scholars of sociocultural studies and linguistic anthropology started adopting chronotopes in their examination of social interaction, mostly in offline contexts but more recently in online contexts as well.

Karimzad (2021) mentions two main waves in chronotopic research. The first wave, he maintains, was inspired by Agha’s (2007) work on ‘cultural chronotopes’ in the mass-mediated spacetime. Building on Bakhtin’s (1981) ‘novelistic chronotope’ and generalizing the notion’s applicability beyond the literary text, Agha discusses how any chronotope, i.e. the “semiotic representation of time and place peopled by certain social types” (p. 321), is constructed and experienced within and across (a variety of) participation frameworks in interactions and how these chronotopic representations organize discourses, relations, and practices. In his work, he

specifically underlines the importance of the ‘circulation’ of these representations across participation frameworks, their ideological loadedness, and how they become more ‘effective’ if used in contrast to each other. He, for instance, discusses how widely known, largely circulated, chronotopes come to acquire standard names such as chronotope of religion, tradition, or colonialism, and the contrastive chronotopes of Darwinism versus Creationism.

Back to the first wave of chronotopic research: the scholars within this wave (e.g. Davidson, 2007; Dick, 2010; Divita, 2014; Harkness, 2013, 2015; Karimzad, 2016a; Koven, 2013b; Perrino, 2007; Rosa, 2016; Stasch, 2011; Wirtz, 2014, 2016; Woolard, 2013) follow Agha’s reconceptualization of (mass-mediated cultural) chronotope(s) as they “track the interaction of (large-scale) chronotopes through which understandings of sociocultural phenomena such as language, race, ethnicity, and progress are discursively constructed and negotiated” (Karimzad, 2021, p. 4). In studying the sociocultural aspects of migration, for instance, Dick (2010) looks at data from non-migrant Mexicans in the city of Uriangato, where they discursively position themselves with regard to U.S.-bound migration from Mexico, and demonstrates how these discursive acts are performed in relation to a “modernist chronotope” that draws contrast between images of “progress” and “tradition”. Koven (2013b), on the other hand, examines the (meta)discourses of transnational Luso-descendants to explore how “chronotopes of modernity” and “chronotopes of backwardness” are put into a frame of contrast in portraying Portugal as ‘less evolved’ and ‘less progressive’ than France, ultimately providing the participants with the opportunity to present themselves as ‘antiracist’ and ‘modern’ individuals.

The second wave of chronotopic analysis, according to Karimzad (2021), follows

Blommaert's (2015, 2017, 2018) conceptualization of chronotopes as 'mobile contexts'³¹ that are organized within and across a scalar system that determines their scope of communicability and recognizability. These mobile contexts, Blommaert argues, are associated with certain norms, indexicalities, moralities, and identities that together encapsulated within a time-space-personhood bundle get invoked in interaction and guide the actors' social behavior and additionally provide them with the normative criteria to evaluate others'. Blommaert, therefore, uses chronotope to capture the dynamicity of *context* and *contextualization*. Within this second wave of chronotopic research, some socio-cultural/-linguistic notions have been retheorized through the lens of chronotopes. Two of them that are specifically important for this dissertation are Blommaert and De Fina's (2017) work on *chronotopic identities* and Karimzad's (2020, 2021) work on *chronotopes of normalcy*.

Blommaert and De Fina (2017), for instance, have taken a chronotopic approach to identity and language use arguing that identities are always sociolinguistically enacted, performed, and evaluated relative to specific time-space-personhood configurations, or chronotopes, that operate at different scales. That is, identity and identity work is chronotopically organized. Demonstrating specific examples from an ethnographic study on a superdiverse fifth-grade classroom in Sicily, Blommaert and De Fina argue for a chronotopic approach to identity and identification. They illustrate that rather than a traditional sociolinguistic approach, that would take as its focus the student-teacher identities, a chronotopic analysis of the interactions and specifically multilingual practices can shed light on the centrality of time-space

³¹ Some scholars in the first wave (e.g. Perrino, 2007) discuss 'event chronotopes' and 'cultural chronotopes' in narratives and in terms of how the 'narrated' or 'story' chronotopes come to be aligned with the 'narrating' or 'story-telling' chronotopes (i.e. the immediate interactional context) especially through the participants' use of deictics, what is referred to as 'cross-chronotopic alignment' (see also Agha, 2007). It should be noted, however, that Blommaert's (2015, 2017, 2018) conceptualization of chronotope as 'mobile context' goes beyond the context of narratives in discussing how social and semiotic behavior is guided and constrained by various differently-scaled time-space configurations (see also De Fina & Perrino, 2020).

configurations (e.g. daily lessons vs. other activities (e.g. peer communication)) to the social order in the classroom and “how such timespace configurations affect relevant identity categories, roles, and negotiations regarding the practices performed by the group” (p. 6). In fact, Blommaert and De Fina argue that it is only through examining how large-scale chronotopes (e.g. the chronotope of ‘student life’) and small-scale ones interact in communication that identities and identity work can be understood in their full complexity.

Another related work to this dissertation within the second wave of chronotopic analysis is Karimzad’s (2020) re-theorization of sociolinguistic normativity (see also Blommaert 2017, 2018) through a chronotopic lens. In this work, Karimzad introduces *chronotopes of normalcy*, viewing normalcy as “a set of scalar and chronotopic relations” (2020, p. 108). These chronotopes of normalcy, that guide social actors’ behavior and evaluations, get dynamically constructed and constantly updated through socialization, or as he calls it *(re-)chronotopization* (Karimzad, 2020), processes to be adopted and used in future interactions. In other words, what is evaluated as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ depends on what chronotopes of normalcy are available and accessible in social actors’ repertoires and which one(s) they orient to at that moment of interaction. Looking at metalinguistic data centered around ‘appropriate language use’ from Iranian Azerbaijani migrants in the US, he specifically focuses on the normativities associated with language choice (Azeri, Farsi, English) and how these normativities are chronotopically organized. Karimzad also emphasizes that “chronotopization processes do not necessarily concern issues of language choice; they refer to broader ideological processes through which images of normative behavior at *various levels of semiosis* are linked to images of people, times, and places” (p. 116, emphasis added).

In his later work (Karimzad, 2021) he conceptualizes chronotopes as fractally scaled

semiotized images of contexts associated with various levels of fractal detail. Depending on social actors' chronotopization histories and the "chronotopic input accessible to them" (p. 8), images of normativity are developed at various levels of semiotic detail, or in other words with various levels of chronotopic *resolution*, and added to the actors' repertoire. The higher-resolution normative images develop from smaller-scale first-hand experiences with contexts while the lower-resolution images of normativity become discursively constructed through exposure to larger-scale hegemonic chronotopes. An example that is related to this dissertation is the normative images of 'migration' social actors have at their disposal depending on their chronotopization histories and specifically with regard to whether or not they are migrants themselves, and of course what their migration 'story' is. Generally speaking, migrant Iranians in the U.S., for instance, have higher-resolution images of Iranian and non-Iranian migrants, and their normative sociolinguistic behavior for example, in the U.S. since they have *lived* in first-hand interactions with them and the contexts they are situated in. On the contrary, for the non-migrant Iranians residing within Iran normative images of Iranian and non-Iranian migrants in the U.S., or in general of life as a migrant in the U.S., have been developed mostly through their interactions with larger-scale mass-mediated 'cultural' chronotopes (e.g. through Hollywood movies, EFL textbooks, local dominant ideologies, etc.) and are thus of lower-resolution and are more 'prototypical' (see also Chapter 6 of Karimzad & Catedral, 2021).

As can be seen, essential to understanding the notion of chronotopic resolution is understanding scales, specifically in relation to chronotopes. While scale/scaling has been conceptualized in different ways (Blommaert, 2007; Carr & Lempert, 2016; Catedral, 2018; Gal, 2016; Rymes & Smail, 2021), I follow the conceptualization put forth by Blommaert (2015, 2017) and Karimzad and Catedral (2021) that underscores scales as mediating chronotopes.

Thus, whenever invoked chronotopes are examined in discourse, the scale(s) at which they are interpretable, and actually interpreted, has to be taken into consideration in the analysis as well. Focusing on contexts of migration and transnationalism in their book on the transnational imaginations among Iranian Azerbaijani and Uzbek migrants in the US, Karimzad and Catedral (2021) demonstrate throughout the chapters how chronotope offers “a way to theorize a more structured understanding of migrants’ engagements with polycentricity, as it allows us to capture the spatiotemporal organization of various contexts that become relevant to migrants’ identities, language ideology, and language use” (p. 9). Taking a step further and highlighting the utility of the notion of ‘resolution’, they further argue that integrating chronotopes and scales within one system,

allows us to trace the normalcies social actors presuppose, the different trajectories through which these normalcies are (re-)constructed and enregistered, the scales at which they are shared or unshared, the ideological forces through which they are legitimized or de-legitimized, and their interaction with the immediate chronotopic contexts (p. 25)

Given that social media platforms mediate identity performances, provide opportunities for the bottom-up creation of new (semiotic) norms, and are by definition trans-local/-national, a chronotopic approach, and better yet a chronotopic-scalar approach (Karimzad, 2021), proves to be promising. In this dissertation, therefore, I analyze the novelties and intricacies of social media communication and online identification practices among migrant and non-migrant Iranians through a chronotopic-scalar framework and demonstrate the utility of the notions of chronotopization and resolution in studying online interaction.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1. Overview

In this chapter, I elaborate on my ethnographically grounded approach to data collection and discourse analysis. First, I specifically discuss which social media platform was chosen for each case study as the main source of data and why. I give a general description of the data collection procedures from the different platforms (Instagram, YouTube, Twitter) for each analysis chapter. I also lay out the details of the ethnographic aspects of the project. I then provide a broad description of the analysis procedures, including translation and transcription conventions that I used, and the discourse analytic techniques that I adopted. Since the analysis chapters deal with different case studies, I include the more detailed and specific description of both data and analysis for each chapter in the corresponding chapter. I conclude this chapter by briefly discussing ethical issues and considerations in online sociolinguistics research and the guidelines that I have followed.

4.2. Data

The data for this dissertation come from a larger on-going ethnographic project that I have been carrying out since 2016 on the online and offline sociolinguistic practices and patterns of semiosis of Iranian communities both in the context of Iran and in diaspora. Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) research extensively draws upon “ethnography to study the local and situated character of Internet practices, to reconstruct the emergence of virtual communities, and to chart the unfolding of online activities in relation to offline events” (Androutsopoulos, 2008, p. 3, see also Varis & Hou, 2020). For this project, I follow online and offline ethnography (Androutsopoulos 2006; Hymes 1996); specifically, I follow the screen-based method of online ethnography that is also supplemented by my ethnographic work in offline spaces that I will

discuss below.

The online data have been collected through systematic and non-participatory observation of Iranian social media users' discursive/semiotic patterns on a variety of social media platforms, with a focus on Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. For each of the main research questions outlined in Chapter 1, my focus is on one platform as my main source of data. It is important to note, however, that I have been tracing the sociolinguistic phenomena that I discuss in all chapters across the platforms as well and will include this type of 'supplementary' data when helpful to the analysis. In this sense, then, my ethnographic work is multi-sited and longitudinal which is in line with much work in digital (and 'traditional') ethnography in the context of globalization. The data include Farsi and English languages, as well as Farsi and English scripts. They also encompass a variety of semiotic forms, including texts, images, memes, GIFs³² (i.e. Graphics Interchange Format), and videos. Since each chapter deals with a case study, the data in each chapter revolve around a certain topic that involves SM users' perceptions of normativity, language ideologies, and the interconnection of these with images of Iranianness and (trans-)national identities.

It is worth noting that my offline ethnographic work throughout this project has guided and informed my online research as well in terms of both data collection (e.g. which platform to focus on for a certain topic) and analysis. More specifically, as someone who has grown up and lived in Iran as an adult (until August 2016), and has also lived in diaspora (specifically the U.S.) and identifies, and gets identified, as a migrant Iranian, I have had the opportunity to be involved in interactions where I could observe Iranians', and migrant Iranians', linguistic practices and

³² A GIF is "a computer file format for the compression and storage of visual digital information" and also "an image or video stored in this format" (definition retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/GIF>) (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

metalinguistic positionings about the topics this dissertation is investigating outside of the ‘online world’. This is especially the case since, unlike a lot of my fellow educational immigrants in the U.S., I had the chance to travel smoothly back and forth to Iran until 2018³³. In such interactions, for example in gatherings where I was participating as a friend or in events where I would take part as a member of the community, I would always make careful observations if a certain topic of interest (e.g. new online orthographic conventions, ‘good/bad’ English, accent, Iranianness, etc.) would come up in the conversations. In these cases, I would sometimes ask follow-up questions to guide the conversations in a way that more language-ideological comments would be elicited and would take extensive notes.

Throughout this study, thus, I would revisit my online data and their analysis and interpretation through cross-checking with my offline ethnographic data. This form of combination of online and offline ethnography, on the one hand provides a more contextualized and comprehensive picture of interaction on social media due to the inseparability of the ‘online’ and the ‘offline’ worlds, and on the other hand can be considered a more ‘realistic’ option since having follow-up interviews with all the social media users in this study was not feasible due to the scope of the work. This multi-sited longitudinal ethnography that is carried out in parallel in both online and offline spaces, thus, has allowed me to view the tweets, Instagram posts, comments, etc. not as a “reified end products, texts and pieces of language” but as discourses whose production and uptake are “contextualized ‘actions’” (Varis, 2016, p. 56).

³³ Many Iranian students in the US are granted single-entry visas. This means that upon leaving the US (for example to visit home) they are required to apply for a new visa, a process which is expensive, time-consuming, and difficult with no guarantee in general. On the other hand, some Iranian students, myself included, are granted limited multiple-entry visas that are usually valid for two years. During the two years, these students can leave the US and re-enter on their visa; however, after the two years pass, their multiple-entry visa starts functioning as a single-entry visa.

4.2.1. Online data

In this section, I will discuss the specific platforms that I focused on for investigating each main research question. It should be noted, however, that although I explicitly focus on three main platforms here, my online ethnography was carried out within and across several platforms (including Facebook and Telegram) in order to confirm the patterns that emerged from the data and the interpretations.

4.2.1.1. Instagram data

Instagram is the main source of data for investigating the first research question on the performance of (trans-)nationality through Internet memes. Instagram, being the most popular social media photo sharing platform, is an excellent choice for a study of Internet memes which are most often *images* with or without superimposed text (for more detailed information on memes see Chapter 5). The data come from public accounts that are allocated to so-called “Persian” or “Iranian” meme-making. I have also used specific hashtags (e.g. #Persianmemes) to gain access to more varied data from different public accounts. Besides the memes themselves, the captions of the Instagram posts containing them and the comments on these posts are also analyzed. A dataset of 580 memes was collected from August 2017 through August 2021. More detailed information about the Instagram data can be found in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1.

4.2.1.2. YouTube data

YouTube is the main source of data for my second research question on the evaluations of (migrant-)Iranianness through the lens of an idealized image constructed by the SM users. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this question revolves around a viral music video and users’ positionings towards it and the artists. Besides analyzing and discussing the music video itself, I focus my attention on a specific genre of YouTube videos, i.e. reaction videos. In Reaction

videos, users (usually those who have a fairly sizeable number of followers/subscribers) video-record their reactions to the music video as they are watching it, supposedly, for the first time. By analyzing these videos, with specific attention to linguistic and visual indexes, I trace the constructing of the iconic image and I explore how users evaluate the identities and moralities of the artists through this image. Besides the videos, I analyze the comments posted on the reaction videos as well to investigate the collective invocation and solidification of this idealized image. The music video was posted on YouTube on April 28, 2020 and the reaction videos that I focused on were all posted in the time window of April 28-30. More detailed information about the YouTube data can be found in Chapter 6.

4.2.1.3. Twitter data

Twitter is my main data source in investigating the last research question with regard to orthographic normativity and images of ‘Iranianness’. Twitter was chosen as the main platform for this topic because it has the most potential for back and forth ‘arguing’ about a certain issue. This is due to the platform’s affordances (e.g. retweeting, tagging, hashtagging, etc.) and the media ideologies (Gershon, 2010) associated with it (e.g. used for sharing opinions about sociocultural and political issues). Given that one of the main focuses of the last research question is on the argumentative dynamics of online chronotopic identity work, I decided to use Twitter as the main source. From May 2016 to March 2019, I compiled a dataset of 2,000 unique (re)tweets publicly posted and tagged with #هکسرده (i.e. #hekasreh, that is, the name of the non-standard orthographic norm of interest). Similar to my data from the other two platforms, I analyze comments that were posted on the tweets to investigate the dialogic nature of the interactions. More detailed information about the Twitter data can be found in Chapter 7.

4.3. Analysis

4.3.1. Translation and transcription

For the Farsi portion of my data, I have translated the texts and provided explanatory comments where there is need for some cultural reference or knowledge. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the translations, I have checked my translations with Farsi-speaking colleagues who have academic and professional background in English translation. The data were transcribed according to the conventions adopted from Conversation Analysis (Atkinson & Heritage, 2006); the conventions used can be found in Appendix A. In Chapter 5, for the Instagram posts of memes, I have included a screenshot of the meme and when the captions (of the Instagram posts) are relevant I included and explained the captions in the body of the text. Most of the comments analyzed for this chapter were in English and were also mostly embedded in the paragraphs but at times I have included them as separate excerpts. In Chapter 6, for the YouTube reaction videos, excerpts are shown in two columns. The left column shows the original transcripts in Farsi and the right one shows the English translation. The comments in this chapter are included either in the body of the text or in tables (like Table 4 & 5) with their translations. Finally, in Chapter 7, the screenshots of tweets are included accompanied by their translations. Some more data are also mentioned in the body after each screenshot to show similar patterns across tweets. The comments for this chapter are shown in screenshots along with their translations. Throughout the dissertation, regular font shows Farsi and boldfaced shows English. Please note that for many of the comments, and the ‘extra’ data for tweets, that are embedded in the paragraphs rather than shown in separate excerpts, the original text (if Farsi) is not provided and only translation is included to save space. Therefore, following the font patterns is important to have a consistent reading experience; nevertheless, I have added a footnote reminder about this

in each chapter as well. The last point that should be noted about the data is that SM users whose data is included are labeled as SMuserNUMBER (e.g. SMuser1, SMuser2, and so on). To be consistent, the numbering is done starting at 1 and increasing in number as further data is included throughout the analysis chapters. In other words, the numbers do not show actual chronological order of the comments posted.

4.3.2. Analysis of discourse

As with my data collection, my analysis of the data also follows an ethnographic approach. I thus conduct a discourse analysis that is ethnographically grounded, similar to what Wortham and Reyes (2020) propose in their discourse analysis beyond the speech event. This means that I analyze my online data (i.e. memes in Chapter 5, the videos in Chapter 6, tweets in Chapter 7, and comments in all chapters) as situated within broader sociohistorical online/offline contexts and as part of pathways of interconnected speech events (Wortham & Reyes, 2020) or texts that I have systematically observed or gained knowledge of through my ethnographic work. These will be incorporated and elaborated upon in each chapter. As such, in my analysis, I pay attention to 1) how presupposed differently-scaled social contexts and the normativities associated with them shape the SM users' practices, and 2) how the SM users (re-)create contexts and images of normativity, and the identities situated within these, through their semiotic practices (cf. Silverstein, 1992). To accurately understand these processes of contextualization, then, I adopt chronotope as 'mobile context' (Blommaert, 2017) as my central analytic tool.

In my chronotopic-scalar analysis of the data, my focus is particularly on how the SM users in the different chapters invoke time-space configurations with varying levels of resolution and semiotic detail to authenticate and evaluate self and others as (migrant-)Iranians. To trace these chronotopic processes of online identity work, I examine certain (meta)linguistic and

(meta)semiotic practices. The basis of my analysis is on non-referential meaning and indexicality (e.g. Silverstein, 1976); that is, how certain linguistic and non-linguistic signs point to certain social meanings. I specifically pay attention to Code-Switches (CS), script switches and transliterations, orthographic conventions, accompanying images/emojis, etc. Additionally, I pay close attention to deictics (spatial, temporal, and person) as they anchor people and events in certain time-spaces and are essential to identity work (e.g. *us* vs. *them* in differentiation acts, *here* vs. *there* in drawing contrasts between normativities, etc.). Another important material for my analysis is the SM users' metapragmatic evaluative practices such as voicing, metalinguistic comments, and other non-linguistic signs like using emojis, etc. Through the analysis, I track the users' alignment/disalignment patterns, their constructions of normative images of contexts and of people, and their positioning themselves within and/or relative to these.

4.3.3. Ethical considerations

The offline portion of the project was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. With regard to the online ethnography, which was the main part of this dissertation, I followed the conventional guidelines proposed in the field (Androutsopoulos, 2008; Varis, 2016) with regard to privacy protection (e.g. anonymization and attention to public/private profiles). As both Androutsopoulos (2008) and Varis (2016) note, in online ethnographic projects flexible case-by-case decisions should be made “depending on, for instance, type of platform, the sensitivity of the issue investigated and possible harm caused to those whose communications are being studied” (Varis, 2016, p. 60). After taking the above-mentioned factors into consideration, I decided to anonymize profile names of all the users

except in Chapter 6 and the viral music video due to its commercial side³⁴. Finally, I also did not include any parts of data that could be considered, even slightly, sensitive in any of the chapters.

³⁴ The artist, Elnaz Golrokh, for instance had promoted her music video in her interviews with fashion magazines ahead of the music video upload. An interview can be found at <https://www.cosmopolitanme.com/celebs/exclusive-elnaz-golrokh-takes-us-behind-the-scenes-on-her-first-music-video> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

CHAPTER 5: MULTISEMIOTICITY AND PERFORMING MIGRANT-IRANIANNESSTHROUGH INTERNET MEMES

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I focus my attention on the ways in which SM users draw on their perceptions of normativity, of text at various semiotic levels and of context, to authenticate themselves as a certain type of Iranian, i.e. migrant Iranian. I specifically demonstrate how Iranian SM users living outside of Iran construct their ‘migrant Iranian’ identities and tell their ‘stories’ in Internet memes through 1) drawing on their perceptions of normative images of ‘here’ (i.e. abroad where they currently live) and ‘there’ (i.e. Iran) and creating third-space (Bhabha, 1994; cf. Bhatt, 2008) ‘hybrid’ chronotopes within the memes where they perform their transnational identities, and 2) constructing chronotopically-situated personhoods normative of ‘here’ and of their life as a migrant Iranian in interactions with whom they portray their transnational experience. Overall, I argue that the nuances of creative and complex multisemiotic identity work performed through memes, and how they are taken up by other SM users, can be accurately captured through a chronotopic-scalar lens.

In section 5.2, I provide a brief background on the research that has been done on transnational identities on one hand and on Internet memes on the other. In section 5.3, I present several memes posted by migrant Iranians for migrant Iranians on Instagram with a detailed analysis of each. In the same section and for all the memes, I also investigate the uptake by examining the comments posted on the memes. Finally, in section 5.4 I summarize the findings of the analysis and discuss how they answer the research question(s) this chapter is based on.

5.2. Memes, Multisemioticity, and Identification on Social Media

In the era of transnationalism, mobility, and technological affordances, scholars have focused on

social actors' dynamic and dialogic acts of identification with a specific attention to the construction and negotiation of transnational identities (De Fina, 2016; De Fina & Perrino, 2013; Duff, 2015; Koven, 2004; 2013a; Park & Lo, 2012). Many scholars of language and migration, specifically, have investigated the ways in which individuals who move beyond the limits of nation-states come to experience and encounter new contexts, and the new sets of moralities, indexicalities, and normativities therein, that are different from, and at times in conflict with, those from 'home'. In navigating these contexts and making sense of 'who they are', these individuals simultaneously orient to normative images of the 'home' and of the 'host' country in their discursive identity performances finding themselves in an in-between state rife with conflicts of hybridity (De Fina & Perrino, 2013). De Fina and Perrino (2013), thus, highlight the importance of "critical reflection on the relationship between language and identity" (p. 510) in any careful examination of transnationalism. Particularly, with the emergence of new technologies and intensified connectivity, scholars suggest that the ways migrants construct and negotiate their transnational identities have been complexified even more (Vertovec, 1999; Blommaert, 2010; De Fina & Perrino, 2013; Lo & Park, 2017; Noguerón-Liu, 2013) as the "new technologies facilitate a mediated co-presence in which the line between being present and being absent is blurred" (Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005, p. 321).

Online communication, however, due to its multimodality gives salience to more than 'language' and therefore it is essential that we move beyond linguistic resources and broaden the focus to *semiotic* resources in studying these identification processes. One of the Internet semiotic 'devices' that has become increasingly popular among social actors is memes. Internet memes, put simply, are most often images with or without superimposed text, often with a specific theme, that rapidly and widely circulate on the Internet. They are heavily intertextual

(Knobel & Lankshear 2007) and multisemiotic (Leppänen & Kytölä, 2016) and can be indefinitely recontextualized and remixed by SM users. They thus provide a discursive space for creative and complex identity performances. Tracing the ‘history’ of research on memes, Prochazka (2020a) notes that in approaching memes there has been “a shift from tentative descriptions, classifications and genealogies of memes as a series of genre-based entities to the ways in which they are situationally co-participating in meaning-making, identity work and managing interpersonal relations” (p. 96). They have been specifically more recently investigated for their potential in community-making online (Nissenbaum & Shifman 2015; Varis & Blommaert 2015; Wiggins & Bowers 2015) and identity work (Ask & Abidin 2018; Gal et al., 2016; Yus, 2018).

Specifically with respect to the research on memes in the migrant/migration discourses, there have been several studies but most of them have focused on how memes are used by SM users in anti-immigrant discourses (see for example Glăveanu et al., 2018; Haynes, 2019; Prochazka, 2020a, 2020b) and for Othering purposes and reinforcing stereotypes (Ding, 2015). These studies mostly discuss how others talk *about* the immigrants through memes and distance themselves from them rather than looking at how immigrants *themselves* navigate their transnational experience within memes. There have been, however, a few studies that have put as their focus the SM users’ constructions of Self as immigrants. Nichols (2016), for instance, discusses how the meme thread “Mexicans Be Like” have been adopted/adapted, circulated, and sometimes contested, by mostly Mexican and Mexican-American SM users to “exert a power to challenge privileged representations of Mexicanness and contest the naturalization of dominant historical discourses” (p. 83). I argue that since memes can easily simultaneously show various time-spaces within one frame through bundles of signs and indexicals, given their intertextuality

and multisemioticity, the ways migrants engage with these devices to navigate their *own* transnational experiences should be investigated more closely. In this chapter, I demonstrate the utility of a chronotopic-scalar approach for analyzing such memes and the uptake of them by the migrant and non-migrant Iranian audience.

5.3. Data and Analysis

5.3.1. Studying Iranian ‘diaspora’ memes

Through my online ethnographic project, I came across several types of memes made *by* Iranian SM users *for* (certain types of) an Iranian audience both inside and outside of Iran. Specifically on Instagram, I identified a number of public pages dedicated to creating and circulating a specific memetic genre, what I refer to as the Iranian ‘diaspora’ memes, with certain distinctive semiotic/linguistic features. The ‘diaspora’ memes, as the name suggests, revolve around portrayals of migrant Iranians’ transnational experiences. In these memes, the meme-creators/users navigate their migrant-Iranianness and construct nuanced transnational identities through drawing upon their hybrid communicative resources and taking advantage of the affordances provided by the multisemioticity and intertextuality of memes as communication devices.

Starting from August 2017 through August 2021, I created a dataset of memes of this genre through systematic observation of the public Instagram accounts allocated to so-called “Persian” or “Iranian” meme-making, taking screenshots of the memes and their Instagram captions. I also used specific hashtags (e.g. #Persianmemes) to gain access to more varied data from different accounts. It is important to mention that while some of these accounts had explicitly mentioned their location in the ‘biography’ section of their Instagram page, my main method for coding a meme as a ‘diaspora’ meme was through identifying the semiotic/linguistic

features that distinguished them from, what I call, ‘inside-Iran’ memes (i.e. memes that are made by Iranians in Iran for a ‘local’ audience³⁵). The most salient features distinguishing ‘diaspora’ memes from the ‘inside-Iran’ ones are: 1) language choice, 2) script choice, and 3) themes. Table 1 summarizes the distinctions between the two genres based on these features.

Table 1 - 'Diaspora' vs. 'inside-Iran' memes

Meme genre	Language choice	Script choice	Themes
Diaspora	English with some (mostly intrasentential) CS instances to Farsi	Roman script (transliteration ³⁶ used in cases of CS)	Experiences of ‘growing up Persian’ OR longing for Iran
Inside-Iran	Almost exclusively in Farsi	Farsi script OR occasionally Finglish	Various topics around local events or everyday local activities

From the dataset of diaspora memes, I selected those that were representative of the patterns observed in the larger dataset for more careful examination. I also downloaded the comments posted on these selected memes, using IGCommentExport on Google Chrome, to investigate the audience uptake and the collective identification practices among the SM users through the back and forth of commenting and replying to others’ comments. In what follows, I present data and detailed analysis of seven memes in two sections. I first discuss how a ‘generic’ migrant Iranian identity gets constructed both within the memes and in the context of the comments posted on

³⁵ Note that this does not mean that all Iranians who live abroad would definitely not see these memes and/or would not enjoy them, but that it is most likely that these memes are more relevant to Iranians residing within Iran and are thus seen and circulated more by them.

³⁶ “Transliteration” refers to the practice of writing a language using the script of another. Farsi-English transliteration, thus, is writing Farsi words using the Roman script. English-Farsi transliteration, in contrast, is writing English words using the Farsi script.

the meme. I then zoom in on the construction, negotiation, and evaluation of certain ‘types’ of migrant-Iranianness by SM users. In examining these processes, I focus on SM users’ invocations of differently-scaled chronotopes of ‘here’ (i.e. diaspora) and ‘there’ (i.e. Iran) and/or their construction and solidification of chronotopically-situated personhoods which aids them in authenticating their own ‘unique’ migrant-Iranianness.

In analyzing the identification processes, I pay particular attention to how different semiotic resources (audiovisual and linguistic (orthographic, phonological, etc.)) are employed by the users to indexically invoke certain time-space frames along with the normativities, identities, moralities, and orders of indexicalities within them. I further explore how the multisemioticity and intertextuality of memes creates a space for the SM users to speak *from* and *about* these chronotopes (Karimzad, 2021) in their performances of migrant-Iranianness. In the analysis of both the memes (and Instagram captions) and comments, I specifically focus on deictics (spatial, temporal, personal), reported speech and voicing, language choice, phonological and orthographic cues, along with other indexicals that anchor the meme to different chronotopes that operate at various scales.

5.3.2. Authenticating the ‘generic’ migrant Iranian

Three different Instagram posts including the memes (and sometimes their captions³⁷), and comments posted on them, are presented in this section. The common theme among these is the SM users’ bringing along of chronotopes associated with ‘here’ (i.e. diaspora) versus ‘there’ (i.e. Iran), and bringing about new ‘hybrid’ chronotopes within the meme-frame. These new chronotopes are constructed through indexicality and the fractal connections between the

³⁷ The captions of the Instagram posts are not always informative or important to the analysis. For instance, many of the captions are for commercial and advertising purposes mentioning different Instagram profiles so that the followers of the page start following those profiles. The captions are included only when deemed useful to the analysis.

brought-along differently-scaled chronotopes and allow the SM users to construct themselves as migrant Iranians in its most generic form: an Iranian who does not currently live in Iran and does not have plans of doing so. The new ‘hybrid’ chronotopes are constructed in a variety of ways but the ones that I focus on here are: 1. drawing on normativities of life of migrant Iranians ‘here’, 2. disrupting the normativities generally associated with ‘here’, and 3. highlighting the physical distance between ‘here’ and ‘there’. I also demonstrate how SM users sometimes create a specific personhood within these brought-about chronotopes, that they mostly refer to as ‘khareji’ (meaning ‘foreigner’), the inclusion of whom helps them to more directly and explicitly position themselves as ‘migrant Iranians’. In what follows, I trace the identification processes by analyzing these chronotopic invocations and constructions with regard to ‘here’ and ‘there’ in Figures 2 through 4 and through examining the hypothetical interactions with the ‘khareji’ personhood in Figure 5.

5.3.2.1. ‘here’ vs. ‘there’: life as a migrant Iranian

‘A piece of home’

Figure 2 shows a meme that was posted on one of the popular Instagram (‘diaspora’) meme-making pages with 159 k (159,000) followers as of August 2021. What we see at first glance in the meme (2,975 likes and 31 comments) is a snapshot of a scene from *Star Wars: Episode VII The Force Awakens* where Han Solo (Harrison Ford) is hugging Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher). This meme is not a very productive one per se in that there are not a lot of widely-circulated adaptations of it and in case of this particular scene, the salient point that stands out is the act of ‘comforting’ and ‘being comforted’ observed through Leia’s sad face and closed eyes and Han’s embracing her with Leia’s head on his chest. In this sense, tracing the resemiotization processes of the meme all the way through the movie scene does not seem to be crucial as the ‘feeling’

depicted in the meme is rather obvious.



Figure 2- Meme#1

We have two characters in the image: we see that the original characters, i.e. Han and Leia, have been re-scripted (cf. Georgakopoulou, 2015, see also Iedema, 2003; Leppänen et al. 2014) as two other entities respectively: 'Sadaf' and 'living in a place without Persians'. While the image of the Star Wars scene might be familiar to many non-Iranians, and the phrase 'living in a place without Persians' is rather self-explanatory, the key to understanding this meme is having a normative image of life in diaspora with a certain chronotopic resolution, and that involves being familiar with 'Sadaf'. A non-Iranian person who does not have access to, and is not familiar with, the lived experiences of Iranians abroad, might put this word in Google Translate and see that it means 'oyster' or 'shell' in English, but that does not say anything about the message in this meme; in fact, it might be confusing and misleading to a conclusion that, for instance, Iranians have a specific liking towards oysters! An Iranian who has had to live abroad, on the other hand, is most likely to know that 'Sadaf' is an international brand of Persian food products, and to have bought its products either online or from a Middle-Eastern grocery store 'here' regularly or at least at some point. Another interesting perspective is that of an Iranian who lives

in Iran: assuming that they come across this meme in their social media networks and understand English and the literal meanings of the text, they might be confused as in their repertoire Sadaf (capitalized) is most likely only a Persian name for girls/women. Therefore, the ‘accurate’ interpretation of this meme depends on the audience’s chronotopization histories, and in turn the level of semiotic details they have access to. I will elaborate more on this below with examples from the comments.

Let us go back to analyzing the meme itself. The meme presupposes the time-space of ‘here’ outside of Iran through mentioning the scarcity or indeed absence of Persians. Note that ‘here’ is not physically anywhere specific but more like an imagined ‘diaspora’. Leia here embodies the ‘Persians’ who ‘live in a place without Persians’ and Han embodies ‘a piece of home’³⁸, that is a reminder of ‘there’ comforting them. Thus, SM users see themselves in the re-scripted Leia, for example one of the comments reads *Yeah... as I moved to this city for work, Persian population was raised by 100% (smirking face emoji)*³⁹. They also acknowledge that they have been ‘comforted’ by Sadaf food products as they have brought them ‘home’; for instance, one of the comments reads *Damn. I felt that... thank you Sadaf* and another explicitly mentions *Sadaf is home*. Therefore, through drawing on the norms of life ‘here’ as migrant Iranians, more specifically living somewhere with few or no fellow countrymen around and having to find comfort in certain cultural practices associated with ‘there’ (e.g. here Iranian cuisine), the SM users portray and authenticate their migrant-Iranianness.

Analyzing the comments gives us an idea into how the meme is received by the audience and how the notions of *resolution* and *chronotopization* (histories) can help account for the

³⁸ The phrase ‘a little piece of home’ is in fact used under the ‘our story’ section of the brand’s website that can be found at <https://www.sadaf.com/pages/about-us> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

³⁹ As mentioned before, throughout the analysis, boldfaced shows English and regular font shows Farsi.

different interpretations of the meme by different users. As mentioned earlier, the key element to understanding this meme is ‘Sadaf’ as an indexical. ‘Sadaf’ can invoke a variety of differently-scaled chronotopes for different users based on their chronotopization histories: it indexes a) the food industry of Iranian cuisine at an ‘international’ scale, b) certain time-spaces (e.g. Middle-Eastern grocery stores) at ‘local’ scales, c) certain norms (cooking Iranian food) within even lower-scale chronotopes (i.e. the ‘Persian-run’ kitchen), etc. As we move from larger to smaller scales, more semiotic details are added to the chronotopic images lending them a higher resolution. Not every Iranian SM user has equal access to these high-resolution images however and this unequal accessibility leads to different readings of the meme. We can observe this differential access in several comments. One SM user has asked *Where is Sadaf?* probably mistakenly thinking that it is the name of an Iranian restaurant (or more generally a venue) somewhere ‘here’ and asking for its location. Another user has commented in Farsi language and Farsi script, which is very rarely used under ‘diaspora’ memes and thus stands out, صدفون نفهمیدم (“I didn’t get (the) Sadaf (part)”). Some other user has replied to the former comment writing *sad af ((short for ‘as fuck’))* attempting to provide clarification for this user, which is in fact a misinterpretation of the meme due to limited access to the relevant chronotopes and the semiotic details associated with them. The point is that depending on the SM users’ chronotopization histories and thus their chronotopic repertoires they would either accurately interpret the meme, misinterpret it, or not get it all. And as the comments reveal, while most migrant Iranians would get the meme, some might not if they, for instance, live in a country where Sadaf doesn’t distribute.

A ‘Persian’ Thanksgiving

Another way through which migrant-Iranianness is constructed and performed through memes is

through disrupting normative images of ‘here’ by simultaneously invoking chronotopes of normalcy associated with ‘there’. Figure 3, a post from another popular (‘diaspora’) meme-making page on Instagram with 304 k followers, is an example of this. The post (800 likes and 15 comments) includes an image of a table with a variety of dishes, the closest to the camera being a whole roasted turkey, along with some text above the image (within the meme) that reads ***When you’re all about Thanksgiving but Persian food is life***. Given that Thanksgiving is a tradition that is not celebrated in the context of Iran, one can assume that the physical context of the picture taken is not ‘there’ but ‘here’, abroad, and perhaps somewhere in North America (in fact the date that this post was made was pointing to its location being in the U.S.).

When you’re all about Thanksgiving
but Persian food is life



Figure 3-Meme#2

A closer look at the picture reveals that this is no regular Thanksgiving table. Besides the Turkey, other dishes (including saffron rice, and dishes of some popular Iranian stews like Gheimeh and Ghorme-Sabzi) disrupt the normative image of a ‘regular’ thanksgiving (with for example rolls, cranberry sauce, green beans, pie, etc.). Looking only at the image in this meme

one would know that there is something off about this ‘thanksgiving table’ but one would not get the whole picture unless they are familiar with Iranian cuisine. This is corroborated by both the accompanying text in the meme and the caption of this post which reads ***Who else is having Turkey with #koobideh and #ghormesabzi today? 🍗🍗🍗(...)#persianthanksgiving.*** The hashtag at the end reveals that this is a ‘Persian Thanksgiving’, a constructed time-space where Iranian and non-Iranian traditions co-exist. The caption includes the names of two very popular Iranian dishes in the form of hashtags (*#koobideh* and *#ghormesabzi*). This explicit mentioning of these dishes might help people with lower-resolution images of Iranian food get the message; that is, the Iranians with higher-resolution images of Iranian food would recognize specific Iranian dishes just from the image. Furthermore, the way the caption is phrased, i.e. asking *who else*, besides ‘me’ the author of the caption and the sharer of the meme, is to elicit alignment and build an in-group: the Iranians who are somewhere outside of Iran where celebrating Thanksgiving is a norm.

The meme itself is invoking the Thanksgiving celebration time-space nested within the time-space of ‘here’ (the diaspora) through explicitly mentioning ‘Thanksgiving’ and through the image of a table with several dishes with the focus on the roasted Turkey. The meme is also invoking time-spaces associated with Iran through the explicit mentioning of ‘Persian food’ and the visuals of the table. Additionally, within the caption the temporal deictic ‘today’ points to a specific time as well, i.e. the time of posting this meme which timely coincides with Thanksgiving day, thus anchoring the post in ‘here-and-now’. Through this disruption of the image of a regular (North American) Thanksgiving, then, SM users argue for their ‘own’ norms as migrant Iranians and create an affinity space (Gee, 2004; Leppänen et al. 2014) where they bond as migrant Iranians. This can be seen in the comments as most people aligned with the

message in the post by posting heart emojis, heart-eyed smiley face emojis, fire emojis, etc. or by posting comments such as ***Facts!!!!*** and ***Straight up.*** But perhaps the most interesting comment is one user (SMuser1⁴⁰) tagging and addressing another user (SMuser2) through the @ function of Instagram (i.e. @SMuser2) and in this way ‘sharing’ the meme with SMuser2. SMuser2 has replied to this tagging by commenting @SMuser1 ***miss you. Wish we were together.*** to which SMuser1 replies back ***me tooooo (heart emoji)***. Both SMuser1 and SMuser2 live outside of Iran and this back and forth reveals that this so-called ‘Persian Thanksgiving’ portrayed in the post might be a ‘normal’ practice in the lives of migrant Iranians abroad that they do with other Iranians (i.e. ***Wish we were together***). Thus, the sharing of the meme (through tagging) is identity work by itself, and the heart emoji and the letter repetition in SMuser2’s reply shows affective engagement around this portrayal of ‘Persian Thanksgiving’.

Visiting Iran

The next meme (26,835 likes and 383 comments), posted on the same Instagram page, includes the portrayal of another ‘normal’ practice of migrant Iranians in the memes by highlighting the physical distance between ‘here’ and ‘there’ and the normative practice of traveling to and visiting Iran in the Summers. The image is adopted from the TV show Rick and Morty which is an adult animated fiction sitcom streaming on Hulu and HBOmax among some other streaming services. As with our example with Figure 2, here again the origin of the meme does not play a crucial role in using and understanding it. In addition, since the meme is, again, not that productive and widely circulated, there is not a large network of pathways of this meme. The ‘feeling’ within the images, similar to the meme in Figure 2, is rather obvious, however. The

⁴⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 4, SM users whose data is included are labeled as SMuserNUMBER (e.g. SMuser1, SMuser2, and so on). To be consistent, the numbering is done starting at 1 and increasing in number as further data is included throughout the analysis chapters. In other words, the numbers do not show actual chronological order of the comments posted.

memes consist of two images (and sometimes three, see Appendix B) arranged vertically. The cartoon character (named Jerry in the TV show) is in bed looking at a picture frame with tearful eyes while what is in the frame is not visible to the viewer. Then in the second image right under the first one, he has put the frame on the end table next to the bed still looking at it with a tear drop falling down his face. What is changed in the adaptations of this meme is what is in the picture frame; and here it is a text that reads *Summers in Iran*. ‘Summers in Iran’ thus is, literally and figuratively, framed as a memory and presupposes that the character in the meme is in fact *not* in Iran at the moment. Other few adaptations of this meme have been also with the theme of sorrowing over and longing for something good in the past that has come and gone (see Appendix B) rendering this particular meme as in line with the meme trend.



Figure 4-Meme#3

The meme was posted during the COVID-19 pandemic and the international travelling restrictions preventing migrant Iranians from performing their regular practice (note the plural marker in ‘Summers’ pointing to the frequent nature of these trips) of visiting Iran during Summertime (cf. Marques & Koven, 2017). The character in the meme thus is anchored into

‘here-and-now’ longing for the regular trips ‘there-and-then’, and thus embodying migrant Iranians highlighting the physical and material distance between ‘here’ and ‘there’, especially more salient in time of COVID. We see again that drawing on the normativities of life as a migrant Iranian and invoking multiple time-space configurations, the SM users authenticate themselves as migrant Iranians. This is taken up by many of the commenters as they align with the meme saying *“it’s not comparable to anything else (heart emoji)”*; *“F*** this(single tear emoji)”*; *“Sooooon (teary eyes emoji)(crying emoji)(heart emoji)”*; etc. The repeated use of emojis, letter repetition, the colorful swearword self-censored with asterisks, and other signs used, all point to the affective and emotional engagement of these commenters with the meme and their identifications as migrant Iranians.

The comment section of this post, however, reveals other layers of complexity and polycentricity the thorough unpacking of which is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this chapter and makes us digress from the topic at hand. Nevertheless, I will discuss how the dynamics in the comments section of this post is different from others in the page and point out how the complexity highlights the role of these ‘diaspora’ memes as a space for migrant identity performances. The comments section on this post stands out from a lot of the other posts of this page in two main aspects: linguistically and attitude-wise. Linguistically, the comments section is more varied than those posted under the other ones from this page; that is, while the comments under the posts of this meme-making Instagram page are usually almost exclusively in English with some instances of CS to Farsi, the comments on this meme show both English and Farsi languages, as well as both Roman and Farsi scripts. Attitude-wise, while the comments on other posts are almost always showing alignment with, and positive evaluation of, the posts, the ones under this post are a mixture of both alignment and disalignment. There is an explanation with

regard to both of these aspects. While most of the posts by this page are commented on by SM users living outside of Iran, this post seems to be hosting comments from SM users both outside and *within* Iran. This might be due to the anchoring of an event *in* the geographical locale of Iran (i.e. *Summers in Iran*) which the non-migrant users might have found relevant to their own experiences; something that was not the case with Figures 2 and 3 for instance. Regarding the language and script choice, the Farsi language, Finglish, and the Farsi script which disrupt the norms of this page, are mostly used by non-migrant SM users which is explicitly pointed out in their comments (that is, they explicitly refer to Iran as where they live through spatial deictics of *here* and *in Iran*). In addition, these Farsi comments almost exclusively show disalignment with the post and negatively evaluate it⁴¹.

Non-migrant SM users' disalignments and negative evaluations of the meme usually includes pointing to the socio-economic issues in Iran and half-jokingly showing desire to 'switch places' with the migrant SM users. The thing I would like to focus on is how the way the meme is 'read' differs based on whether or not the SM user is a migrant. The notion of chronotopization can help us account for this difference in positioning: the phrase 'Summers in Iran', one of the salient elements of this meme, invokes different chronotopic images for migrant Iranians and non-migrant ones based on their lived experiences. For migrant users, the phrase brings along images of memories of seeing their family, relatives, and loved ones and 'vacationing' and 'enjoying themselves' during their annual tradition of traveling to Iran. On the other hand, for the non-migrant ones it invokes images such as having to go to work in the hot weather wearing the mandatory hijab (in the case for women), relaxing on a 'trashed beach',

⁴¹ While there were a few Farsi comments that were aligning with the post and were posted by migrants, these were usually in response to other Farsi comments that were posted by non-migrants contesting their negative evaluation.

etc.⁴² Besides the past trajectories that bring along different images for the migrants and non-migrants, it is also the immediate longings, concerns, and anxieties that trigger certain images, among the many in the SM users' repertoires, to be invoked (cf. Karimzad, 2020). That is, while for migrants, there is longing to go 'back', see family, and alleviate the feelings of homesickness in the Summer, for the non-migrants the present concern is to leave Iran and 'migrate' as soon as they can to escape the socioeconomic situation in Iran. The interaction between the different chronotopization histories and the immediate concerns and anxieties leads to different interpretations of the meme and different positionings in the comment, that at times even turned into 'arguments' between the migrants and non-migrants. This discrepancy between the way the meme is interpreted, guided by the SM users' chronotopes of normalcy, leads to some explicit differentiation acts in the comments by some of the commenters. See for example SMuser3's comment below.

SMuser3's Comment: (original in Farsi with Farsi script, boldfaced shows switches to English)

Bro I just realized that this **page** is for Iranians who were born abroad or live there. What am I (a person) who has never set foot beyond Emamzadeh Hashem ((expression meaning have never even traveled far)) doing here(?) This is why I don't get its **posts**.

This 'realization' and acknowledgement of 'not getting' what the posts mean shows that SMuser3's chronotopization history does not provide him/her with the chronotopic resolution through which this meme makes sense and is relatable. In fact, the message of this meme seems to be in conflict with his/her normative images of 'Summers in Iran' as a result of which he/she sees him/herself as out of place in this page. In addition, this also points to the distinctiveness of

⁴² These examples (i.e. hot weather, hijab, working, pollution, etc.) have all been mentioned by the non-migrant SM users themselves across their comments.

‘diaspora’ memes as a memetic genre and as fertile ground for transnational identification processes.

So far, we have analyzed the memetic identity work in ‘diaspora’ memes that is guided by SM users’ perceptions of normativity through tracing their simultaneous invocations of different time-space frames associated with ‘here’ and ‘there’. I showed that adopting a chronotopic-scalar approach to the analysis, and specifically the notions of chronotopization and resolution, helps account for different interpretations of memes, and the unequal access to the meanings of memes. The next section focuses on the construction of a chronotopically-situated personhood within the meme-frame which is used in SM users’ identification processes as migrant Iranians.

5.3.2.2. The ‘Khareji’ personhood: dealing with the ‘foreigner’

In the previous section, we saw how migrant-Iranianness was performed through anchoring self in the time-space of ‘here’, with all the indexicalities and normativities therein. I discussed the large-scale lower-resolution normative images of ‘here’ in general, e.g. the absence of other fellow countrymen, and the high-resolution normative images of life as a migrant Iranian, e.g. being familiar and having used the ‘Sadaf’ brand. In this section, I demonstrate SM users’ creation of a personhood anchored in the time-space of ‘here’, i.e. the non-Iranian ‘khareji’ (literally ‘foreigner’), and positioning themselves relative to this personhood through which they authenticate their migrant-Iranianness.

If one is following meme pages on Iranian social media, they are likely to have come across memes that either implicitly or explicitly involve non-Iranian characters and their interactions with Iranians in different situations. While these characters are referred to with different words in the memes (e.g. ‘non-Persians’, ‘white people’, ‘Americans’, etc.), the

‘khareji’ personhood is what epitomizes all these characters. *Kharej* is an Arabic loanword that in Farsi means ‘outside’, in a more general sense, or ‘abroad’ in this case here. By adding the /i/ to the end, an adjective is made that can be used to refer to entities that are from outside of the nation; a ‘khareji’ person or ‘khareji’ as the noun, thus, means ‘foreigner’. Note the generality of this noun and how it can generally point to non-Iranianness regardless of what nationality a person is. ‘khareji’, then, is a personhood that is situated in ‘here’, the imagined ‘diaspora’.

Within the memes, the ‘Khareji’ personhood is generally portrayed as naïve to Iranian cultural practices and in interactions where their lack of knowledge of these practices becomes the center of the meme’s humor. For instance, a lot of the memes are about the ‘khareji’ trying (and reacting to) Persian dishes for the first time, trying to pronounce certain Farsi words/names but failing at it, misunderstanding certain sociolinguistic practices (e.g. address terms), trying to dance ‘Iranian’ style, etc. Figure 5 Below shows one such meme.



Figure 5 - Meme#4

This post (4,630 likes and 245 comments) includes a GIF of four seemingly ‘white people’ clog dancing to a traditional Iranian wedding song that is inserted in the background. What is seen in this Figure is a snapshot of the video originally shared. The text above the video reads ‘***Kharejis at Persian weddings***’ with three laughing-crying face emojis following the phrase pointing to the

humorous nature of the meme. Pay attention to the switch to Farsi ('khareji' rather than 'foreigner') and also the hybrid linguistic form of "Farsi noun (written in Roman script) + the English plural marker 's'" which makes this meme's joke inaccessible to non-Farsi speakers from the very beginning.

In the meme, the 'khareji's are put in a specific time-space, i.e. the Persian wedding. Additionally, the very presence of the 'khareji's at a Persian wedding points to the time-space of the meme being nested in 'here', the diaspora, since such an occurrence does not happen too often in the context of Iran. Note how the plural marker 's' at the end of 'wedding' generalizes this kind of interaction to more than one 'Persian wedding' time-space. This generalization, highlighting the recurrence of such interactions, solidifies the 'goofy' image portrayed of 'khareji's dancing across a variety of similar contexts. The origin of this video is not known based on my research, but it has been somewhat widely used on YouTube and as a GIF since 2017. The way the video is resemiotized, on YouTube for instance, is that a track, usually from Hip-Hop, Techno, or Rock music genres, is played in the background and it is portrayed as if these four people are dancing to that specific track. The old-fashioned-ness of the clog dance plus the people's dress and hair style (which reminds the viewer of the 70s or 80s in the U.S.) in the visuals are in conflict with the audio track inserted in the background and yet the people seem to be dancing on the beat to the inserted track which makes the 'mashup' humorous. The links to some of these mashups can be found in Appendix B.

Therefore, besides the general 'foreigner-looking' aspect of the people and their old-fashioned folksy, and definitely different from Iranian style, dancing, this meme gets connected to a network of other similar creative work using this video. Nevertheless, even without having seen the other mashups, the migrant Iranian SM users who come across this meme see

themselves in opposition to the non-Iranian ‘khareji’s, due to the wide circulation of this personhood across social media. They sometimes even recall and explicitly mention memories of their lived experiences that resemble what is happening in this meme. This can be seen in the comments section as many made comments such as *“I am dying, this was my wedding”*; *“@SMuser4 ours...”*; *“@SMuser5 omfg ((short for ‘oh my fucking god’)) white people at our Persian wedding. Sort of like @SMuser6 @SMuser7 @SMuser8”*; *“@SMuser9 throw back to your wedding”*, and so on. This tagging of other SM users points to the shared experience among these migrant Iranians placing them in ‘here’ and highlighting their unsharedness with the ‘Khareji’ personhood invoked. In other words, this meme that merely consists of a text and four people dancing becomes humorous and ‘relatable’ to the migrant Iranians, and only to the migrant Iranians, as they recontextualize it within the first-hand lived experience chronotopes at their disposal. While the non-migrants might come across this meme and find it somewhat ‘odd’ and even funny (white people supposedly dancing goofily to a Persian song at a Persian wedding), they would not find it ‘relatable’ as they do not have those lived-experience high-resolution chronotopic images.

In this section, I have shown constructions of ‘generic’ migrant-Iranianness through memes. In the first subsection I demonstrated how this was achieved through SM users’ situating themselves within the ‘here-and-now’ of diaspora and invocations of chronotopic images that are not accessible to some users, specifically non-migrant ones, with the same resolution. In the second subsection I showed how migrant-Iranian identities were performed in positionings against the created ‘khareji’ personhood situated in the time-space of ‘here-and-now’ through highlighting the unsharedness with this personhood. While I have shown different ways migrant-Iranianness, in its broadest sense, is performed chronotopically through memes, now I want to

focus my attention on a certain type of migrant-Iranianness: the 2nd-generation Iranians. I demonstrate how 2nd-generation migrant Iranian SM users perform their unique transnational identity relative to another type of migrant Iranian that they construct, and solidify, as a figure of personhood in the memes, i.e. their 1st-generation Iranian parent.

5.3.3. Nuancing migrant Iranian identities

Tracking the memes and meme trends from these Instagram pages, I came across another chronotopically-situated personhood, besides the ‘khareji’, created in numerous memes: that of a 1st-generation (henceforth 1st-gen) migrant Iranian parent. This personhood was created specifically by 2nd-generation (henceforth 2nd-gen) SM users’ drawing on their chronotopic repertoires of normalcies associated with a ‘typical’ 1st-gen Iranian mother and/or father that they have developed throughout their chronotopization histories as children of migrant Iranians. I will show here how their understandings of normativity, at *various linguistic/semiotic levels*, guide their identity performances through enregistering the 1st-gen parent personhood.

5.3.3.1. Constructing the ‘1st-generation parent’ personhood

In the two following examples, I demonstrate the chronotopic-scalar processes through which the ‘1st-gen parent’ personhood gets constructed within the meme-frames. In both of these examples, we see that the 2nd-gen SM users invoke normative images they have developed of their parents’ social and linguistic behavior using various signs. Figure 6 shows one such meme where the focus is on making a joke about the 1st-gen Iranian parents’ regular, seemingly too high, expectations of their children and how they communicate this to their children.

The meme (12,468 likes and 166 comments) consists of three different images arranged together, the one on the top left and the one on the bottom are snapshots of a viral video of the 2020 U.S.

State of the Union Address where Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House, rips the then-president Donald Trump's speech in the conclusion of his address⁴³.



Figure 6 - Meme#5

The image on the top right, however, is simply just a hand holding a sheet of paper that has some super-imposed text on it. The arrangement of the images in the meme frame is to suggest that the sheet of paper on the top-right image is actually the original papers that Pelosi is tearing up. This meme template is a fairly recognized one on the Internet, but its popularity was limited to the time that the video had gone viral (see examples of the adaptations of this template in Appendix B).

Focusing on the specific meme shown in Figure 6, we see that Pelosi is re-scripted as *Maman* (the Farsi word for 'mom') and the text on the sheet reads: ***Bachelor of Arts with honours***. Note how *Maman* in the meme, itself chronotopically situated in 'here' through the language choice (i.e. English) and the naming practices of the academic degree (i.e. BA),

⁴³ For more information about the event and the virality of the video see <https://time.com/5765502/state-of-the-union-nancy-pelosi-rips-paper-memes/> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

presupposes the presence of the 2nd-gen child, the creator/sharer of the meme, in the meme as well. In the story that this tells us, *Maman* is handed the child's *BA degree with honours* but is not impressed at all and in a rather harsh reaction rips the child's degree. Through this re-description, the small-scale chronotope of lived experiences and familial interactions among migrant Iranians 'here' gets connected to a larger-scale chronotope of the Union Address event which is itself nested within the even larger-scale chronotope of US politics. Through this cross-scalar and cross-chronotopic re-description, the 1st-gen parent personhood is created.

Invoking a normative image of *Maman* and what *Maman* expects of her child, at least in terms of academic achievements, 2nd-gen SM users create a figure of personhood portrayed as a 'strict' and 'hard-to-impress' parent. The very act of ripping the degree plus the serious expression on Pelosi's face help them achieve this portrayal of their 1st-gen parent. The comments show how this normative image is shared among the SM users as many have commented laughing-crying face emojis and pointed to the 'accuracy' of the meme (e.g. "***The accuracy on this is frightening***"; "***Actually facts (rolling on the floor laughing emoji)***"; "***@SMuser10 @SMuser11 @SMuser 12 these are so on point (laughing-crying emoji)***"; etc.). Additionally, some other users have shown sympathy for the creator/sharer of the meme, and the 2nd-gen child in the meme scenario, through comments such as "***same dude***" or "***This was too relatable (crying emoji) hit too close to home (sneezing face emoji)***". Through these alignments by the audience, the personhood created in the meme gets legitimized and solidified.

The next example, taken from another Instagram page (2,585 followers), sheds more light on what exactly this 'hard-to-impress'-ness means for the 2nd-gen children as it shows the construction of a fairly similar but more nuanced and semiotically-detailed image of the personhood created in Figure 6. As we will see, due to the level of semiotic detail (e.g. the

phonological features and the specific ‘expectations’), the image that we will have of the parent gains higher resolution. What we see in Figure 7 is a meme that is made up of a GIF and a text that goes above it.



Figure 7 - Meme#6

In the actual meme, the GIF that is used is a widely circulated one that contains a very short clip out of the American TV show *The Office* with the serious and disappointed face of the show's main character, Michael Scott, being zoomed in and out quickly. The serious facial expression along with the zooming in and out makes this GIF a good 'reaction' GIF, i.e. something that one would send as a reaction to a message or post to half-jokingly show disappointment and disapproval. The text above the GIF reads *Bacheh* ((*Farsi word for child/kid*)), ***you can become vatever you vant to be but your options are: Doctor, Lawyer, or Engineer***. Similar to the Pelosi meme, the same normative image of a 1st-gen Iranian parent (here based on the visuals, an Iranian dad) and what a parent expects of their child is invoked to create the 'strict' and 'hard-to-impress' figure of personhood.

What is added in this meme, however, is that more semiotic details are added to the image of this personhood through the linguistic indexes: the text is directly quoting the parent

and stylizing (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2008; Rampton, 2009) the speech through 1) the CS to Farsi ('Bacheh'), 2) the directly addressing of the 2nd-gen child using this term, and 3) using phonological cues, shown through orthography, that index Farsi-accented English of many (1st-gen) Iranian migrants. The use of 'Bacheh' in this form puts the 2nd-gen child in direct dialogue with the 1st-gen parent and also points to a power imbalance since 'Bacheh' as an address term is usually used to highlight the hierarchy between the parent and the child in contexts of reprimands, warnings, etc. The text also points to how migrants usually speak mixing Farsi and English together. But most interesting of all is the use of 'vatever' and 'vant' which are altered spellings of 'whatever' and 'want', to invoke the way the 1st-gen Iranian parents 'normally' speak in English: due to the absence of the labial-velar approximant /w/ in Farsi phonological system, English words with /w/ become phonologically adapted to Farsi through replacing the /w/ with labiodental fricative /v/. Through these linguistic details, an imaginable 'voice' is added to the personhood created. Similar to the previous example, the comments section helps in confirming and solidifying this personhood by for example relating it to personal experience (e.g. ***LOL my mom says that all the time***).

This type of 1st-gen parent portrayal by 2nd-gen migrant Iranians through memes on Instagram is in fact part of a larger network of pathways, or to use Agha's (2003) term *speech chains*, on social media where this 1st-gen parent personhood gets circulated, solidified, and ultimately enregistered. For instance, there are many 2nd-gen migrant Iranian YouTubers and Instagrammers whose content creation is in fact focused on video-recording themselves narrating and/or re-enacting their experiences growing up as a 2nd-gen Iranian, usually in a humorous way. In such videos, the 2nd-gen YouTubers act as themselves and also as their 1st-gen migrant Iranian mother and/or father using different signs (e.g. visual signs like a mustache for the role of the

father and a scarf or a certain-style wig for the role of the mother) to index these different identities in their skits. In all of these productions, linguistic indexes, similar to the ones we saw above, are central to the construction and enregisterment of the 1st-gen parent personhood. I will briefly come back to this type of YouTube activity in Chapter 6 when discussing the evaluation of certain migrant Iranian identities. For now, the important thing is that through the enregisterment and invocation of the 1st-gen parent personhood, the 2nd-gen SM users perform their own ‘unique’ but collective migrant-Iranianness.

5.3.3.2. Constructing ‘2nd-gen’ identity through invoking the enregistered ‘1st-gen parent’

The final meme of this chapter illustrates, in a more explicit way, the construction of the 2nd-gen migrant identity by the Iranian SM users. The meme shown in Figure 8 (5,685 likes and 119 comments) is an adaptation of a meme trend under the entry name of ‘Putting on Clown Makeup’ on the knowyourmeme.com database. Based on the website’s description of the general theme of this meme trend, it illustrates “a person making an increasingly larger fool of himself by providing arguments which are deemed increasingly weak or illogical”⁴⁴. Examples of this meme trend can be found in Appendix B.

The meme of interest here, like other memes of this trend, consists of step-by-step images of a ‘tutorial’ of how to put on a clown make up with juxtaposed text for each of the steps. This meme is different from those in Figure 6 and 7 as it is narrated directly by the 2nd-gen child. We find this out explicitly in the final text when ‘my baba mama’ is mentioned (‘baba’ and ‘mama(n)’ are the Farsi words for ‘dad’ and ‘mom’ respectively); however, I argue that because the normative image of the 1st-gen parent personhood has been solidified, the 2nd-gen migrant Iranian audience is likely to recognize that the deictic “I” in *Maybe if I only get A pelus* refers to

⁴⁴ Retrieved from <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/putting-on-clown-makeup> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

a 2nd-gen child who is in fact voicing a parent specifically indexed through “pelus”. I explain this in more detail in the following.



Figure 8 - Meme#7

The content of the text in the meme is basically pointing to a satirical step-by-step ‘tutorial’ of ‘how to appease your 1st-gen Iranian parents’. It invokes a network of different normative behaviors of the parent, i.e. their expectation for their children to be the best students in everything (*Maybe if I only get A pelus((the altered spelling for ‘plus’))*), to have ‘prestigious’ careers (*become a doctor or enginir((the altered spelling for ‘engineer’))*), to marry a very “Iranian/Persian” girl indexed through the very common Iranian name for girls Niloofar (*Marry Niloofar*), and finally their tendency to compare their children to other Persian children (*stop comparing me to other Persian kids*). By the end of the text, we see that the same ‘strict’ and ‘hard-to-impress’ personhood that we saw in the previous section, although with a higher resolution, emerges. The person in the meme, i.e. the 2nd- gen Iranian, is ‘foolishly’ convincing himself that if he satisfies certain expectations of his parents they will be proud and stop comparing him to others. The intertextuality of the meme and its connection to the other

memes of this trend, however, implies that even that is not enough, highlighting and exaggerating the ‘strict’ness of the parents.

From the very beginning, this personhood is invoked for 2nd-gen migrant Iranians and the invocation is again done through phonological indexes, like what we had in Figure 7. *pelus*, referring to the word ‘plus’ in English, is again indexing the Farsi-accented English of the 1st-gen parent as the word ‘plus’ has been epenthesized: since Farsi does not allow consonant clusters at the onset, a vowel (usually /e/) is added to break the cluster to adapt the word to Farsi phonology. Epenthesis specifically is a salient marker of a Farsi-accented English in general (see Sanei, 2019; Sanei, in press) and that of 1-st gen migrant Iranians in particular which often gets mocked and negatively evaluated. Another instance of ‘accent’ shown through orthography is *enginir*, the altered spelling of ‘engineer’. We explicitly find out that this ‘voice’ is recognized by the SM users as one has commented: *“pelus” I can hear it (laughing-crying face)(laughing-crying face)* situating the voice within his/her own lived experience contexts.

The comments section, as with most of the memes analyzed, shows alignments from other SM users and through these alignments, a collective experience is constructed through which the SM users authenticate their identities as 2nd-gen migrant Iranians. One SM user has commented *Ahahahaha i feel this shit (crying face emoji)(laughing-crying face emoji)* pointing to the relatability of the meme to his/her lived experience. Several commenters have commented the clown face emoji semiotically identifying with the clown (read 2nd-gen Iranian) in the meme. Another commenter has posted *I swear to god even, EVEN if i become the richest in the whole mf ((motherfucking)) world imma be compared to my doctor nieces*. Note the linguistic/semiotic hybridity of this comment through orthography (emphasis shown through capitalization), abbreviations, and the vernacularized speech (*imma be*) while authenticating

migrant-Iranianness.

Thus, 2nd-gen migrant Iranians' social media activities with regard to their authenticating their 'unique' migrant-Iranianness leads to the emergence and solidification of a figure of personhood which they keep invoking in their future online constructions of themselves as 2nd-gen migrant Iranians. Finally, it should be noted that while the 'voice' of the 1st-gen parent is used in a joking manner, there seems to be more of a nostalgic appreciation stance toward it (cf. Koven & Marques, 2017) rather than mocking or negatively evaluating it. For instance, there is no negative metalinguistic evaluation in any of the comments saying things like "after these many years living here they cannot speak correct English" or things of this sort. This point becomes very interesting when in the next chapter we discuss the idealized image of a 'good' (migrant-)Iranian and how the same phonological details that are nostalgically viewed as part of the 2nd-gen child experience become negatively evaluated and indexically linked to the character and morality of other migrant Iranians. I will specifically focus on the notion of resolution to account for these different and polycentric positionings in Chapter 6.

5.4. Discussion

In this chapter, I have illustrated the multisemiotic memetic identity work of migrant Iranians on social media and demonstrated the usefulness of a chronotopic-scalar approach in investigating this identity work. In section 5.3.2, I showed how 'generic' migrant-Iranianness is constructed by SM users' invocations of different chronotopes of normalcy and chronotopic normative images of their life 'here' (diaspora) away from 'there' (Iran). In analyzing several of the 'diaspora' memes, I specifically showed how not every SM user would 'get' the memes accurately, or at all in some cases, and discussed how the adoption of a chronotopic-scalar approach can help us account for these discrepancies through notions of resolution and chronotopization. In section

5.3.3, I demonstrated how a specific type of migrant-Iranianness, i.e. 2nd-gen migrant-Iranianness, is constructed relative to another type that is enregistered by the SM users themselves online, i.e. the 1st-gen migrant Iranian parent. I demonstrated that through the ‘diaspora’ memes, which are part of a larger meaning-making network engaging 2nd-gen Iranian users in performing their transnational identities, a chronotopically-situated figure of personhood is constructed, circulated, enregistered, and later invoked. Specifically, I discussed the enregisterment of the ‘voice’ of this personhood through analyzing how the 1st-gen parents’ speech style gets invoked and paired up with certain normative images within the meme-frame. Thus, I showed how normativities of text, especially at the lexical and phonological level, become linked with normativities of context, and of people situated within those contexts, and how through repetition and circulation of the pair-up the personhood is solidified.

Note that both the solidification (and invocation) processes and the enregistered personhood of the 1st-gen parent are chronotopically organized. That is, solidification happens within and across certain online, and even offline (i.e. ‘real’ and ‘actual’ interactions between 2nd gen children and their 1st gen parent), time-spaces with their own sets of normativities and identities. Moreover, the personhood itself is anchored within the smaller-scale lived contexts of migrants’ lives. Due to its situatedness in smaller-scale chronotopes that have been developed and updated through first-hand experiences of 2nd gen migrants, the image of the 1st gen parent personhood is deeply semiotically detailed and is thus of high resolution for the 2nd gen SM users. We saw this with how they would directly relate the memes and the characters within the memes to their own personal experiences (e.g. *“LOL my mom says that all the time”* or *““pelus” I can hear it (laughing-crying face)(laughing-crying face)”*). We observed the same type of direct connections to lived experiences with the ‘Khareji’ personhood as well with SM

users not just relating the meme to their own experiences but also to their shared experience with other SM users (e.g. “*@SMuser9 throw back to your wedding*”). Some would even go further and see their ‘actual’ non-Iranian friends embodied in the characters within the meme (“*@SMuser5 omfg ((short for ‘oh my fucking god’)) white people at our Persian wedding. Sort of like @SMuser6 @SMuser7 @SMuser8*”). All in all, the nuances within these identification practices captured through a chronotopic-scalar approach highlight its utility in analyzing online multisemiotic communication especially in contexts of transnationalism. Finally, analyzing the ‘diaspora’ memes revealed the agentive and creative ways in which transnational stories are told and identities are performed through memes by migrants *themselves*. Ding (2015), for instance, discusses how certain memes that are centered around ‘Asian/Asian American parent characters’ (e.g. the ‘High Expectation Asian Father’ or the ‘Tiger Mom’ meme series) work in reinforcing racialized stereotypes; I, on the other hand, showed in this chapter how migrant Iranian 1st-gen parent personhoods are created by the migrant children themselves and are portrayed as an essential part of their upbringing about which they feel nostalgic and around which they construct collective identities with other SM users. Thus, I point out that the research on memes in contexts of migration should also include more studies that focus on the ways migrants’ subjectivities are imagined and expressed in memes that they make themselves.

CHAPTER 6: ‘ACCENT’ AND EVALUATING (MIGRANT-)IRANIANNES ON YOUTUBE

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter 5, I investigated the identification processes of migrant Iranians through memes and demonstrated how SM users’ normative understandings of social behavior, at a variety of semiotic levels, informed by their chronotopization histories guided their constructions of selves and others as ‘migrant Iranians’. I also showed the processes through which norms of text were indexically linked to normativities of context, and the identities therein, and how these indexical links are enregistered. In this chapter, my focus is still on online performances, and more importantly evaluations, of (migrant-)Iranian⁴⁵ identities and how a chronotopic-scalar analysis helps accurately understand these processes. What is different in this chapter and in this case study, however, is that I use a viral video of a migrant Iranian micro-celebrity and the reactions to this video to illustrate how a lack of access to smaller-scale higher-resolution chronotopes of lived experiences combined with the power and prevalence, and in fact relevance, of certain widely-circulated (hegemonic) larger-scale chronotopes plays out in creating idealized images of (migrant-)Iranianness on social media.

More specifically, I show how in contexts of virality where there is wide circulation of a cultural product, orienting to high-scale idealized chronotopes, e.g. those feeding from Standard language ideologies and neoliberalism, becomes more relevant and frequently adopted by the majority of SM users in evaluating the product and the producers. I particularly focus on the ways ‘low-resolution’ perceptions of migrants’ English speech lead to the Farsi-accented English

⁴⁵ As will be revealed in the analysis, these identities have a very ‘national’ aspect to them in SM users’ evaluations in the sense that they are portrayed as national ‘representatives’ at a transnational scale. However, at the same time, the identities are anchored in the time-space of diaspora. For this reason, I chose to put the “(migrant-)” in parentheses.

of a migrant Iranian be used not just for playful mockery or nostalgic appreciation, as we had in the previous chapter with the 2nd-gen SM users, but for negative and serious evaluation of, and delegitimizing, the person's identity as an (migrant-)Iranian by both migrant and non-migrant Iranians. Through examining the SM users' online identity work, I trace the emergence of an iconic image of a 'good (migrant-)Iranian', that is itself chronotopically situated, in SM users' positionings and demonstrate how they evaluate certain people in certain contexts through the lens of this idealized image. I argue that the evaluation processes and the SM users' orientations to certain chronotopes in these processes can be carefully investigated through paying attention to their chronotopization histories and the resolution of the chronotopic images of 'migration' at their disposal. Finally, I highlight again how transnationality concerns both migrants and non-migrants, that is both 'mobile' and seemingly 'non-mobile' Iranians, in the era of digital communication as the users together create this idealized image and circulate it in the trans-local/-national context of social media.

In the following, I provide a brief background on the research done with regard to transnationality and the role of English in the global neoliberal marketplace in section 6.2. In section 6.3, I first explain the context of the viral music video and then present data with a focus on the music video itself and the reaction videos 'reacting' to it. I focus on one specific reaction video and analyze the video as well as the comments posted on the video in detail. I summarize the findings and discuss the responses to the research question(s) for this chapter in section 6.4.

6.2. English, the Neoliberal Subject, and the Internet

Many scholars in sociocultural studies who work in the areas of globalization, transnationalism, and identity have been interested in the impact of neoliberalism and the neoliberal ideologies on language and subjectivities. Within the neoliberal framework, where accountability,

competitiveness, efficiency, and profit are valorized and prioritized and in fact used as ‘keywords’ (Holborow, 2012), language becomes commodified and technicized as yet another ‘skill’ that can help individuals with socio-economic mobility in the new neoliberal economy (Cameron 2005; Hall, 2014; Heller 2003, 2010; Park, 2011, 2016; Urciuoli 2008; for an overview on neoliberalism and language see Allan & McElhinny, 2017). English, being the ‘international language’ and the global lingua franca is at the center of the neoliberal project of self-making, specifically for migrants but in general for ‘modern’, ‘cosmopolitan’, and ‘elite’ people trying to compete in a global marketplace and participate in global cultural flows (e.g. May, 2011).

Individuals, thus, are encouraged, or better say coerced, to striving for an ‘ideal’ neoliberal subject who is responsible for his/her own socio-economic and linguistic capital, and his/her own destiny, and is not a ‘burden’ to the system (see for example Hall, 2014; Park, 2016). Due to the centrality of English in neoliberal ideologies, a ‘good’ neoliberal subject is one who speaks Standard English fluently, and preferably “native-like”. If s/he fails to do so, it is not just his/her speech that gets negatively evaluated but his/her whole identity might be labeled as ‘stupid’, ‘incompetent’, ‘lazy’, ‘immoral’, ‘disloyal’ to the nation (i.e. the ‘host’ country), and so on (Piller, 2016; Park & Wee, 2017). Bernstein et al. (2015), focusing on ELT (English Language Teaching) contexts specifically, maintain that “Second/foreign language education, like education more broadly, has not only been influenced by neoliberalism; it has been responsible for reproducing many of its discourses” (p. 6).

The importance of speaking a ‘good’ Standard English as an aspect of this idealized image gets more salient in the case of migrants and especially ‘skilled-worker’ migrants (see Giampapa & Canagarajah, 2017). Besides the neoliberal ideologies highlighting the self-

responsibilization of acquiring linguistic capital which puts pressure on the migrants particularly by the country of residence, migrants are also often perceived by their ‘own people’ as ambassadors of the nation’s image representing a whole nation to people who might not be familiar with them and their situation. More recently, Internet has allowed for ‘images’ of migrants to more widely circulate and be seen by increasingly more people creating more anxiety among social actors for their nation’s image (cf. Koven & Marques, 2017). This is especially the case when a cultural product made by, or featuring, a migrant goes viral: the ‘representation’ aspect becomes more salient and is felt by the people as more ‘real’. For Iranians, their representation by (migrant-)Iranians themselves is of great importance as many do not think that images of them and their country portrayed in the global, especially Western, media is accurate and/or sufficient. In such an atmosphere, online platform gains large significance.

In this chapter, I apply a chronotopic-scalar approach to the analysis of discourses around a viral music video by a migrant Iranian which became infamous for its ‘bad’ English and for supposedly “ruining the image of Iran and Iranians”. I discuss the collective identity work that is done by SM users on YouTube particularly showing how in the identity performances, orienting to large-scale dominant chronotopic images of normativity, that feed specifically from Standard language ideologies and hegemonic neoliberal ideologies, is more relevant and adopted by the overwhelming majority of the SM users, migrants and non-migrant alike.

6.3. Data and Analysis

6.3.1. The ‘TINK’ phenomenon

On April 28, 2020 Elnaz Golrokh, an Iranian makeup artist and fashion model and also Instagram micro-celebrity (3.6 M followers as of August 2021) currently living and working in the UAE (i.e. the United Arab Emirates), posted a music video with the title of ‘Just follow me’

on her YouTube channel (41.4k subscribers as of August 2021). In the music video (available to view at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnosNoprFIE>), Elnaz and her long-term partner Hamid Fadaei, who is also a model in the fashion industry and reportedly the producer and director of the music video⁴⁶, perform a love song in English and Farsi while ‘acting’ in a scenario. The caption of the YouTube video reads

The video is about a girl and a guy during quarantine⁴⁷. They both see each other with their imaginations and feel that they are together. At the end of the video, the guy wakes up and felt it was a dream - until he sees a note. The woman had written “just follow me” and it ends on a cliffhanger. So maybe the next video will explain what really happened
wink emoji

The video itself stands out from other videos of Elnaz’s channel since all the other videos on her channel (n=63) are of her giving either make-up tutorials or occasionally professional reviews of different cosmetic products. With 1.3M (million) views so far, ‘Just follow me’ is Elnaz’s channel’s most viewed video since the channel’s inception in August 2016 while the average views of her next 10 most viewed videos is 171.41k. As can be seen, there is a significant difference in the size of the audience and in fact the video had temporarily become number 10 on the Trending videos⁴⁸ on YouTube after it was posted. This was of significance because it was allegedly the first time that a video by an Iranian had made it to the trending list of YouTube.

Despite the video’s large audience, it has the lowest rating⁴⁹ on Elnaz’s channel by the

⁴⁶ Mentioned in the caption of the YouTube post.

⁴⁷ The video was made and posted during the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 and the lockdown and quarantining in many countries.

⁴⁸ For information about what ‘trending’ on YouTube means, how it works, and why it is important visit <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/7239739?hl=en> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

⁴⁹ The analytics were retrieved from <https://socialblade.com/youtube/channel/UCw7Wy2j6CyfQBpMn6E5DRsg/videos/mostviewed>. (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

viewers. To put this in perspective, while the average rating for her 10 most viewed videos, excluding ‘just follow me’, is 93.19%, the rating for this video is 56%⁵⁰, a fact which again makes this video stand out. It is not surprising, therefore, that the virality of the video has been mostly due to how ‘bad’ the video was received to be and that the virality does not necessarily show its popularity but its infamy. Right after it was posted, the video encountered a backlash from the Iranian audience living both inside and outside of Iran as they started sharing the video and talking about it on a variety of social media platforms including YouTube itself but also Twitter and Instagram. The negative sentiments towards the video were so strong that the artists turned off the comments on the video after a few days, but the negative evaluations of the video and the artists by the SM users kept growing and circulating through different Internet devices, such as memes, hashtags, mashups, parodies, and reaction videos. While the negative evaluations of the video were generally about the ‘low quality’ of the performance, they almost unanimously were centered around the artists’ ‘bad English’ in the English part of the song, particularly making salient certain phonological details associated with Farsi-accented English speech. I demonstrate through this chapter how in evaluations of Elnaz and Hamid’s performance, and specifically their English, SM users’ normative judgements are guided by larger-scale chronotopes that feed from hegemonic neoliberal and sometimes interestingly nationalistic ideologies. I show how through invoking these chronotopes, an idealized image of a ‘good (migrant-)Iranian’ is constructed and argue that an insight into the patterns of chronotopization histories of the SM users, both inside and outside Iran, can account for this type of idealized image being constructed.

While my online ethnography included systematic observation of SM users’ positionings

⁵⁰ According to the description on the analytics website mentioned in the previous footnote, this percentage was a metric taking into account both the number of likes and dislikes of the video.

in a variety of data forms and across platforms, I focus in this chapter on ‘reaction videos’ and SM users’ reactions to these reaction videos portrayed in the comments they post on such videos. To reiterate from Chapter 4, ‘reaction videos’ are a genre of YouTube videos where YouTubers, that is users who have a fairly sizeable number of followers/subscribers, video-record their reactions to a certain video as they are watching it for the first time and share the video with their subscribers. These videos are sociolinguistically rich since the YouTubers’ ‘reactions’ by themselves are evaluative of different aspects of semiosis, including language, of the video being watched. Despite their sociolinguistic richness, however, there have only been a few studies that have focused on analyzing reaction videos. Chun (2017), for instance, is one of these studies where reaction videos are the focus of inquiry. In her paper, she looks at evaluations of language hybridity and normativity through investigating reaction videos to K-pop (i.e. Korean pop genre) music videos by two English speaking fans. She suggests that reaction videos “when embedded in the YouTube space (...) produce a layered participant structure consisting of three nested texts” (p. 61); that is, the original video (e.g. the K-pop music video), the reaction video itself, and the YouTube comments space. She thus underlines the importance of examining users’ interactions with the videos and with each other. Following the same logic, and especially since I am concerned with SM users’ (collective) identity performances, I also examine these three different layers. In the remainder of this chapter, I first provide a description of the music video itself paying attention to the English language used by the artists and certain semiotic features. I then discuss and summarize the patterns I observed within and across the reaction videos that were posted on YouTube about this video in the two days following its upload (i.e. April 29 and April 30) and then focus on analyzing one specific reaction video posted by a well-known migrant Iranian YouTuber. I finally move on to analyzing the comments posted on the reaction

video by migrant and non-migrant Iranian SM users. Besides the reaction video and the comments, I also include supplementary data from other social media platforms when deemed necessary or helpful to the analysis.

6.3.2. The music video

‘Just follow me’ looks like many other run-of-the-mill pop music videos. The video (three minutes and thirty seconds long) starts in a dimly lit bedroom with a close-up of Elnaz’s high heels walking into the room. There are many visual elements typical of ‘romantic’ pop music videos, e.g. shots of candles being lit, wine being poured into a glass and then sipped by Elnaz, etc. Soon after, a different shot shows Hamid, who is in a different room, as he takes off his shirt and pours some whiskey and starts sipping on it under the dim red light of a lamp. The first verses (in English) are sung by Hamid until 0:31 and the song and the music video transition quickly to Elnaz and the chorus. The song altogether is of the pop music genre with some influence from House/Electro. From 00:16 to 1:17 is the section with English verses and from 1:36 to 2:53 is the part where verses are in Farsi, and finally from 2:58 to 3:29 part of the English verses get repeated. The English and Farsi verses are not translations of each other but are fairly similar in content and are both about longing for and declaring their love for each other. The video ends with a shot of a coffee table where the words “Just follow me” have been written with a red lipstick.

The small-scale immediate time-space of the music video is situated within the large-scale time-space of ‘here’, the diaspora, indexed most saliently through the appearances of the artists (not dressing according to the public norms of Iran), the consumption of alcohol⁵¹, and the use of English. The switch to Farsi which happens at 1:36, however, brings about a new ‘hybrid’

⁵¹ Public use of alcohol is banned in Iran.

chronotope. The performance is also situated within the larger-scale genre of pop music videos, with their own sets of normativities. In most cases, except Rap and Hip-hop for instance or specifically localized and regional performances, these normativities feed from ideologies of Standardness, and are thus nested within higher-scale chronotopes of normalcy. This means that both the English and the Farsi spoken in ‘Just follow me’ should ‘normally’ be the Standard variety. Elnaz and Hamid, however, are disrupting these normalcies through their Farsi-accented English which is not going unnoticed by the viewers.

Despite the many non-linguistic features of the video, what I would like to focus on, based on the observed prevalence of it in the SM users’ discourse, is the artists’ linguistic practices, specifically their English language use. For this reason, I do not discuss the Farsi part of the video. Table 2 shows the lyrics of the English part. The first column shows which artist is singing the section. The second and third columns show the English lyrics and timestamps respectively. Finally, the last column lists the most salient and marked phonological features⁵² that index Farsi-accented English using IPA symbols.

Table 2 - English lyrics ('Just follow me')

	Artist	English Verses	Timestamp	Marked phonological features
1	Hamid	I can see your mind I can feel your love Your eyes changed my way Your eyes changed my way	0:16-0:30	/veɪ/ for /weɪ/

⁵² It should be noted that while there are also prosodic and suprasegmental features that were transferred from Farsi to the artists’ English speech, I focus here on the most salient phonological features that were specifically pointed out by SM user viewers of the music video.

Table 2 (cnt'd)

2	Elnaz	You don't know me Don't ever think, think you know me Just follow me Just follow me Just follow me	0:32 – 0:47	/tɪŋk/ for /θɪŋk/
3	Hamid	You drive me crazy You're the one I need You can leave me tomorrow See you in my dreams	0:48 – 1:02	/dəraɪv/ for /draɪv/ /vʌn/ for /wʌn/
4	Elnaz	I just wanna find someone To take my heart away I don't wanna think about You can take me anywhere	1:04-1:18	/vʌnə/ for /wʌnə/ /sʌmvʌn/ for /sʌmwʌn/ /əveɪ/ for /əweɪ/ /vʌnə/ for /wʌnə/ /tɪŋk/ for /θɪŋk/ /əbat/ for /əbaʊt/ /ɛnɪvər/ for /ɛnɪwər/

The most salient of the ‘mispronounced’ English words in the fourth column of Table 2 that got picked up by SM users was the word ‘think’ being pronounced as /tɪŋk/. Due to the absence of the dental fricative /θ/ in Farsi phonology, it gets replaced by /t/ in phonological adaptation processes. Therefore, pronouncing English words that contain this sound has always been reported as a struggle by Iranian English language learners. In fact, pronouncing think as /tɪŋk/ rather than /θɪŋk/ is a very common linguistic ‘error’ among Iranian English speakers. The audience of the Elnaz Golrokh music video, however, take this to mock her English, negatively evaluate her (migrant-)Iranian identity, and her character in general. ‘Tink’ got adopted by SM

users in many other productions like memes (see Figure 9 below for an example) and started to widely circulate through hashtags (#tink and #تینک) across platforms. The ‘bad’ English in the music video and, ‘tink’ especially, got such a high level of attention that on May 1, 2020 (i.e. three days after the video was uploaded), an online English language institute called ChatterFox⁵³ published a video on their Instagram page (retrievable from https://www.instagram.com/p/B_pfLdNHC5N/) evaluating the artists’ pronunciation and giving tips on how to not speak like them⁵⁴. While, as can be seen, there are many angles through which this viral video and its impact can be examined, in what follows, I narrow my focus to reaction videos that evaluated this music video.



Figure 9 - a 'tink' meme

6.3.3. The reaction videos

The reaction videos to ‘Just follow me’ have been mostly made by young Iranians living in diaspora. This is most probably because YouTube is a blocked platform in Iran and in order to access it users need to use VPN anti-filter software. Additionally, because of the relatively

⁵³Official website can be found at <https://chatterfox.com> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

⁵⁴ This ‘instructional’ video is itself very sociolinguistically rich and worthy of further investigation in how it orients to standard normativity and how in these orientations it commodifies the phonological features for its own marketing purposes.

narrow bandwidth in Iran, uploading and viewing videos online is very slow⁵⁵ preventing users from high engagement of prosumption on YouTube. That said, however, the videos are still ‘consumed’ by both migrant and non-migrant Iranians. As for most reaction videos made in response to viral cultural productions, the ones on ‘Just follow me’ were also mostly made and posted on several YouTubers’ channels within 24 to 48 hours of the upload of the original music video, although there were a few reaction videos posted later (in July 2020 for instance). I gathered data from six reaction videos (one uploaded by a non-Iranian, YT6 in Table 3) that were posted within the 24/48-hour time window mentioned above and took note of observed patterns across these with regard to what semiotic features they paid most attention to and how they positioned themselves relative to both the music video and the artists. Table 3 demonstrates some basic information about the reaction videos. All the information portrayed in the table is as of August 2021 and the profile names of the YouTubers have been anonymized.

Table 3 - Reaction videos’ summary

No.	YouTuber Info			Date posted	Video views	Likes	Dislikes	comments
	Subscriber s	location ⁵⁶	Video views					
1	YT1			April 29	181 k	3.4 k	117	2591
	174 k	Sweden	102 M					
2	YT2			April 29	139 k	3.2 k	119	1801
	86.1 k	Canada	35 M					
3	YT3			April 29	163 k	3.7 k	135	2800
	34.9 k	Canada (Iran)	14 M					

⁵⁵ As of August 2021, Iran was reported to be ranked 134 among 180 countries with regard to its internet speed (information retrieved from <https://www.speedtest.net/global-index/iran>)

⁵⁶ Locations are based on what had been self-reported by the YouTubers in their ‘About’ page. However, in a few cases my ethnographic observations showed that the location that was reported was inaccurate. In these cases, I have put the ‘actual’ location based on my ethnographic observation in parentheses.

Table 3 (cnt'd)

4	YT4			April 29	5.8 k	201	9	-
	8.74 k	- (Canada)	704 k					
5	YT5			April 30	1.4 k	51	1	60
	-	UK	106 k					
6	YT6			April 30	5.9 k	116	19	247
	3.58 k	US	479 k					

The videos ranged from around 7 to 14 minutes in length and featured either one or two YouTubers in the shot who were watching the music video and reacting to it. The norm with this type of video is that the actual video, i.e. the one to which the YouTubers react, is played on the screen and the YouTubers' real-time reactions are shown in a small box at a corner of the screen; the point is that the viewers can simultaneously see the actual video and the YouTubers' reactions to specific scenes. Sometimes in the middle of watching the actual video, the YouTuber pauses the video to show some stronger reactions and talk more; in these instances, sometimes the YouTubers' shot becomes the focus on the screen again and then it goes back to the small box overlay mode.

Although the YouTubers were located in different places and had different histories, there were repeating patterns with regard to their positionings, what they saw at stake culturally with the video, and their metapragmatic evaluations⁵⁷. Across the videos, there was a general trend of discussing the 'success story' of the artists, Elnaz especially, in their field of expertise, i.e. fashion and makeup industry, and highlighting how this 'low-quality' production "ruined their reputation". Almost all of the YouTubers speculated that this production could have been

⁵⁷ The patterns discussed exclude YT6 who was a non-Iranian YouTuber.

performed ‘badly’ intentionally to become viral, attract more followers/subscribers, and that basically it could have been done as a marketing strategy⁵⁸. They also all talk about the content and how ‘nonsensical’ it is but they only focus on content for the Farsi part of the song; for the English part, the focus is exclusively on the artists’ ‘bad’ English. In all of the videos, more attention was paid to Elnaz and her performance despite the equal duration of Hamid’s appearance in the music video and his part in the song. This is most likely due to the fact that Elnaz is more well-known than Hamid, with for example 3.6 M followers on Instagram while Hamid has only 628 k.

In all of the videos, several acts of ‘voicing’ (Agha, 2005; Agha, 2007; Bakhtin, 1981; Koven, 2013a, 2013b) were performed by the YouTubers where they would mockingly repeat what the artists were singing (i.e. direct citational practices) and/or use the same stylized speech (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2008; Rampton, 2009) hypothetically speaking on behalf of the artists. Through these ‘voicing’ acts, implicit and explicit negative evaluations of the artists were made. Interestingly, again, most of the voicing happened with Elnaz and during the English part of the song. Additionally, in their reactions, all of the YouTubers would create hypothetical scenarios where they would be directly speaking to the artists addressing them by asking the question “why did you do such a thing?”, again distancing themselves from the artists and negatively evaluating their production, and them by extension. In almost all of the videos, after the YouTubers were done watching the music video, they would go over the comments that were posted on the actual video⁵⁹ and show alignment with the commenters. It is important to note

⁵⁸ My online ethnography included looking at the artists’ pre- and post-music video Instagram posts and specifically pre- and post-music video interviews with certain talk shows to both examine their ‘regular’ English speech and also observe their own attitudes towards the music video and the reactions to it. In an interview, this speculation was explicitly mentioned by the host and indirectly rejected by the artists. While my observations show that the mispronunciations were not intentional, used as a marketing strategy for instance, I will not elaborate on this topic to maintain the chapter’s focus.

⁵⁹ Note that this was before the comments were disabled by the artists after a couple of days.

that, in all of the videos, while discussing the artists' 'bad' English, the focus was exclusively on the Farsi-accented English, and particularly on the marked phonological features mentioned in Table 2. In other words, the disruption of the Standard was being noticed at the phonological level rather than the lexical or structural level. For instance, the one structural error in the lyrics ("I don't wanna think about, you can take me anywhere") was not mentioned in any of the reaction videos as an instance of 'bad' English. Another example of non-standard language use not being picked up by the YouTubers (and other SM users in general) was the lexical and structural 'errors' in the description of the video mentioned in 6.3.1. Finally, all the YouTubers expressed concerns, sometimes playfully but sometimes seriously as well, about how the music video, and especially the 'bad' English, can ruin Iran's, and *all* Iranians', image on a transnational scale.

These similar patterns show us the YouTubers' similar orientations in their evaluations of the performance. The immediate chronotopes that these YouTubers are speaking from are spread across the large-scale time-space of 'here', the diaspora, and in YT3's case situated within 'there', Iran. We see, most importantly, that they are from both English speaking and non-English speaking countries (US, UK, Canada vs. Sweden, Iran); however, they all target the artists' non-standard English which reveals their orientations to hegemonic chronotopes of normalcy.

For a closer analysis, I focus on reaction video number 2 from Table 3 posted by YT2. This video was selected because, first, it was one of the most viewed ones with 139 k views and was from a well-established migrant Iranian YouTuber's channel (86.1 k subscribers, 35 M video views). In addition, and more importantly, during my longitudinal online ethnographic project, I was following this YouTuber's channel and had familiarized myself to some extent

with his migration background, content creation style on YouTube, and sociolinguistic practices. Particularly, I found his reaction video and positioning relative to the Farsi-accented English in ‘Just follow me’ the most interesting since he is one of the 2nd-gen migrant Iranians, mentioned in the previous chapter, who engage in the construction and enregisterment of the 1st-gen parent personhood, with Farsi-accented English as one of the key resources, in his YouTube channel. That is, there is a discrepancy in YT2’s evaluations of the same ‘accent’, when it is in the context of his lived experiences with his parents versus when it is in the context of this viral music video by these young 1st generation migrant Iranians. This, therefore, shows his polycentric normative orientations which will be discussed in the following.

6.3.3.1. YT2’s reaction video

YT2, a young YouTuber born in Iran and living in Canada from a very young age, has different types of videos in his YouTube channel. The playlists include topics such as “parodies”, “comedy skits”, “surprises”, “experiments”, etc. The notable thing about the channel, however, is that in most of the videos one could see, at least traces of, Farsi and (migrant-)Iranianness. YT2 also has videos specifically on Persian language and culture (e.g. a video in which he discusses different interjections in Persian). His videos in general show his fairly good knowledge of Iran’s current scene and youth culture for a 2nd-gen migrant Iranian. Due to this up-to-datedness, therefore, the channel’s viewers include both migrant and non-migrant Iranians, as well as a few non-Iranians. The channel’s videos are a mixture of Farsi-language and English-language with instances of CS. That said, a larger portion of YT2’s videos are in English with frequent switching to Farsi. YT2 is fluent in standard Farsi and speaks an English that is closest to American standard English. Additionally, he also can fluently speak a regionally accented Farsi that is associated with Isfahan, a province in central Iran; he does not commonly speak with

Isfahani accent, however, which makes its use marked.

One of the popular playlists in YT2's channel is a series of comedy skits in which he talks about and re-enacts his experiences growing up as an Iranian in diaspora and his interactions with his 1st-gen Iranian mother and father in general. It is in these videos that we see the invocation and further enregisterment of the 1st-gen parent personhood that we observed in Chapter 5. In these videos, he acts in different roles: 1) himself, 2) an Iranian parent (the mother most saliently shown through a loosely-worn scarf, the father most saliently shown through a beard and a mustache), and 3) a 'khareji' (foreigner) person (shown through a long or short blonde wig for a girl and a boy respectively). The scenarios revolve around the 'struggles' caused by the cultural gap between himself as a 2nd-gen Iranian and the parents as 1st-gen (still-almost-fully-Iranian) parents.

Language is at the core of meaning-making and identification processes in these scenarios. While YT2 in the role as himself always speaks a standard non-accented English with some occasional switches to Farsi, he always adopts a stylized speech marked by certain phonological features associated with Farsi-accented English (e.g. the epenthesis, replacing /w/ with /v/, etc.) and frequent switches to Farsi when he plays the role of the parents. The supposed parents' speech is also marked by several grammatical and structural errors (e.g. "where you are go?" instead of "where are you going?"). Through this 'voicing' of the parents he thus distances himself from the parents in the context of the video and also contributes to the enregisterment of the 1st-gen parent personhood. As with what we had in the previous chapter, here too the Farsi-accented speech of the parents is taken as lighthearted jokes showing a sense of nostalgic appreciation and affection, and basically as an essential element of a 2nd-gen Iranian's lived experiences. Thus, a divergence from this kind of lighthearted and playful stance towards a very

similar speech style in the case of the reaction to Elnaz and Hamid's Farsi-accented English is sociolinguistically significant and worth looking into.

The reaction video, seven minutes and twenty-one seconds long, is in Farsi with some switches to English. Interestingly, there is also switches between standard 'accent-less' Farsi and Isfahani-accented Farsi, which as I mentioned above is marked due to the fact that Isfahani accent is not used regularly in the videos in the channel. The video starts with usual 'greetings' with the viewers and pointing out the topic of the video and then moves on to the small box overlay mode that was mentioned above for putting on display YT2's real-time reactions to the music video while it is being played in the larger screen. After watching the video, which in the case of YT2 is not completed but half-watched (elaborated on in the analysis), he moves on to reading SM users' comments on the original video showing alignment with them. The video ends with an invitation to 'subscribe' to the channel and keep following his videos. Note that the following analysis is not necessarily based on the chronological order of what happens in the reaction video; rather, I discuss interactionally significant moments that have at their core 1) the normative judgements of the artists' English, and of their identities as (migrant-)Iranians, and 2) concerns about Iran's and Iranians' image/reputation. In both of these 'categories' of moments, I pay attention to the differently-scaled chronotopes of normalcy that are invoked in YT2's reactions for the evaluations of the video and the artists.

6.3.3.1.1. The 'bad' English and normative judgements

The video starts with YT2 uttering and repeating the following string of sounds with an Isfahani accent for four times: /vɑi/. This utterance can be ambiguous as it can be a Farsi interjection used in this repeated way to show shock, pain, and regret but can also be the nativized Farsi form of the word "why" where /w/ is replaced with /v/ through phonological adaptation processes. There

is a superimposed text (“why?”) at the bottom of the screen (getting zoomed in on in each repetition), however, that shows the latter is the case. From the very beginning, then, stylized speech is being adopted by using Farsi-accented English mockingly to set the tone for what follows in the video, i.e. the negative evaluation of Farsi-accented English in the music video. The repeated question ‘why?’ that YT2 is asking is not explicitly elaborated upon right after but it points to the shock around why such a ‘bad’ video should go on YouTube’s trending page. He highlights his shock by mentioning that this is the first time that an ‘Iranian’ video has made it to YouTube’s trending page and then points out to his audience, i.e. fellow migrant and non-migrant Iranians, that before jumping to conclusions and getting happy and excited about this ‘achievement’ one should take a look at the number of “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” and how ‘disliked’ the video has been.

Watching the first English section (1 & 2 in Table 2)

While watching the music video, YT2 does not show any strong reaction until the singing part begins. After Hamid’s turn in the first English section is over, he pauses the music video, looks at the camera, takes a deep breath, and with hand motions pointing at the screen he’s watching the music video from says “disgereis↑ dis↓ (.) gereis↑”⁶⁰ and goes back to watching the video. What he says is an epenthesized form of the word “disgrace”. As mentioned in Chapter 5, epenthesis is one of the widely-used Farsi phonological adaptation processes: the consonant cluster /gre/ on the onset is not allowed, therefore, an /e/ is added to break the cluster. Epenthesis is one of the commonly used phonological indexes of Farsi-accented English (see Sanei, 2019; Sanei, in press), so similar to the specific pronunciation of “why” that we had at the beginning, YT2 seems to be keeping up with his stylized speech that maintains the tone of his reaction video

⁶⁰ All throughout the analysis, the words that are phonologically-marked are written in IPA transcription in the excerpts.

and implicitly points to the Farsi-accented speech of Hamid. Note, however, that so far there has not been any explicit reference to the fact that the thing that is a “disgrace” is in fact the ‘bad’ English in the music video. This becomes more and more apparent as the reaction video unfolds.

During the very first English verse by Elnaz (“you don’t know me, don’t ever think, think you know me”), YT2 raises his eyebrows and widens his eyes in surprise and looks at the camera with a serious face and then back to his screen. He then pauses the video and bursts into a long laughter (12 seconds) at the end of which he tries to say something, but the laughter prevents him from speaking. He then brings his face close to the microphone and mockingly repeats what Elnaz was singing with the Farsi-accented English, ‘tink’ being emphasized:

Excerpt 1

1. “ Don’t ever tink ↑, tink you kno- (hhh)”	1. “ Don’t ever tink ↑, tink you kno- (hhh)”
2. Mikhad bege “ think ” ((pronounces it as /θɪŋk/)) ke mishe fekr↑ ((in Standard Farsi))	2. (She) wants to say “ think ” ((pronounces it as /θɪŋk/)) which means thought/thinking↑ ((in Standard Farsi))
3. (Hahaha)	3. (Hahaha)
4. ((sips on his tea)) Chai be khoda az gulum rad nemishe ((in Isfahani-accented Farsi))	4. ((sips on his tea)) (the) tea, swear to god, doesn’t go down my throat ((in Isfahani-accented Farsi))

His mockingly quoting of Elnaz is followed by him taking an authoritative position, mentioning what Elnaz intends to say and what she ends up saying through which he implicitly points to Elnaz’s failure to comply with ‘standard’ norms of speaking English. His translating “think” is also interesting showing again the authoritative role he is assuming; that is, he is implying that there may be people in his audience who do not know what “think” means and might need

guidance and clarification. Following a laughter, he switches from standard Farsi to Isfahani-accented Farsi to make the lighthearted joke that he is finding this so funny that he cannot easily drink his tea. This kind of switching pattern from standard to Isfahani-accented Farsi is observed repeatedly, in later excerpts, when YT2 wants to change the tone from serious to joking.

His next move after the chorus by Elnaz ends is that he appears in a long black disheveled wig not only ‘voicing’ Elnaz anymore but actually impersonating her through adding more semiotic details to the ‘voice’: he repeats parts of the chorus in Farsi-accented English (“just follow me, just follow me, don’t ever tink, don’t ever tink”) while dancing ‘sexually’ in a wig. This very quick silly impersonation of Elnaz allows YT2 to distance himself from Elnaz even further. The wig however is gone in the next shot where he continues watching.

Watching the second English section (3 & 4 in Table 2)

As Hamid’s second turn in the English section begins, YT2 starts increasingly laughing while watching until he pauses the video covers his face and looks at the camera saying

Excerpt 2

1. Nemitunam (hahaha) nemitunam	1. I can’t (hahaha) I can’t
2. “You deɾaɪ ↑ v me kereɪ ↑ zi ” ((waving his index finger at the camera))	2. “You deɾaɪ ↑ v me kereɪ ↑ zi ” ((waving his index finger at the camera))
3. Khodaya↑ jok e ((pronounces ‘jok’ with a voiced alveolar affricate / dʒ/))	3. Lord↑ it’s a joke ((pronounces ‘jok’ with a voiced alveolar affricate / dʒ/))

Repeating “I can’t” at the beginning, YT2 implies that he is not enjoying watching this music video. Despite the laughter, through saying that he cannot keep watching the video he indirectly shows his negative evaluation of the video yet again. Right after that, the negative evaluation gets centered on the Farsi-accented English again by using direct quotation, epenthesizing

“drive” and “crazy” and emphasizing them. An interesting point is that, while Hamid in the music video actually epenthesizes “drive”, he does not epenthesize “crazy” (see Table 2). Therefore, it seems like while Hamid’s linguistic practices, at the phonological level, do comply with the Standard at times, YT2 is distorting what he is quoting to make it more consistent with a typical strong Farsi-accented English speech so that he can more convincingly delegitimize Hamid’s English speech. We have another instance of this later in this section when YT2 is quoting Elnaz. Throughout this ‘direct’ quotation, YT2 keeps waving his index finger pointing it at the camera. This is semiotically charged as through the theatrical gesture he is juxtaposing an index of authoritative stance with a ‘silly’ accent highlighting the ‘silly-ness’ of the way Hamid is speaking English. This is confirmed by his next comment where he explicitly evaluates the performance as a ‘joke’ using Isfahani-accented Farsi.

The next moment I examine is after Elnaz’s first verse in the second English section (“I just wanna find someone to take my heart away”). After the sentence is uttered by Elnaz, YT2 pauses the music video, rubs his face with two hands, slaps his face, and starts laughing.

Excerpt 3

1. (hahaha) (.) “ to take my heart øver ”	1. (hahaha) (.) “ to take my heart øver ”
2. <u>æve:ɪ</u>	2. <u>æve:ɪ</u>
((looks back at the screen and resumes watching for the second verse))	((looks back at the screen and resumes watching for the second verse))
((Pauses after the second verse and pretends to barf))	((Pauses after the second verse and pretends to barf))

After laughing at Elnaz’s verse, or better say at how it was uttered, YT2 quotes Elnaz using a stylized speech, specifically changing the /w/ in “away” to /v/ nativizing it to Farsi. He then goes

one step further, singles the word “away” out and ‘Persianizes’ it even more by changing the schwa⁶¹ into /æ/ and emphasizing both of the phonological changes. He thus strengthens the Farsi ‘accent’ in the English by yet again distorting what was uttered by Elnaz, creating more distance between himself, the Standard English speaker, and her. His pretending to barf at the end of the excerpt shows his extremely negative evaluation of the performance, and specifically of the English spoken. Similar to what we saw with Hamid in Excerpt 2, here again for “away” Elnaz is indeed attempting to preserve the English phonology: she does not completely adapt “away” to Farsi and pronounces it as /əveɪ/ (See Table 2) using a labiodental approximant rather than the labiodental fricative /v/. More importantly, she does not change the schwa into /æ/. YT2, thus, is yet again disregarding Elnaz’s compliance with standard norms and manipulate the ‘direct’ quote to make it more consistent with a typical strong, Farsi-accented English speech. Through this, he provides more justifications for his delegitimizing of Elnaz’s English speech.

An interim discussion is in order here to put this zoomed-in detailed analysis into a chronotopic-scalar perspective. In Excerpts 1 through 3, we have seen three main discursive strategies adopted by YT2 in his evaluations, namely ‘voicing’, assuming a ‘more-legitimate speaker’ position, and switching between Standard and Isfahani-accented Farsi. All of these reveal YT2’s orientations to larger-scale chronotopes that feed from Standard language ideologies. First, in his acts of ‘voicing’ in all of the excerpts above, he is performing acts of distinction/differentiation (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Irvine & Gal, 2009) positioning himself as the Standard English speaker. The laughter and comments before and/or after these ‘voicing’ instances highlight YT2’s mocking attitude towards the English spoken by the artists. More interestingly, within these ‘voicing’ acts, the complete and consistent phonological adaptation,

⁶¹ Farsi phonological system does not have schwa and usually replaces it with another vowel in adaptation processes.

even when the artists themselves did not do so (like with /**kereizi**/ in Excerpt 2 and /**æve:ɪ**/ in Excerpt 3), helped YT2 to draw a voicing contrast and exaggerate the non-standardness of the artists' speech. Second, at several moments in the excerpts YT2 more explicitly takes on the role as the Standard, and hence 'more-legitimate', speaker invoking Standardness. This can be seen, for instance, in his prescriptive comment about how "think" should be pronounced in Excerpt 1, line 2, and also in his authoritative hand gesture while voicing Hamid in Excerpt 2, line 2. Finally, his switches from Standard to Isfahani-accented Farsi in accordance with his changing of the tone (from serious to joking) also implicitly points to his orientations to larger- and higher-scale chronotopes of normalcy in evaluating the artists. That is, when he is 'seriously' evaluating them, he uses standard and is thus even in practice functioning within higher-scale normativities. In contrast, when he wants to dampen the seriousness of his evaluations, he scales down to a local and nonstandard variety of Farsi; in other words, he orients to and functions within smaller- and lower-scale normalcies.

Watching the transition to Farsi

The next part is when Hamid starts singing in Farsi. While watching, YT2 starts grooving with the song with his head and right after Hamid says the first verse ("har ja ke hastam" meaning "anywhere that I am") the following happens at the same time that the video is playing:

Excerpt 4

1. "Har ja" ((pronounces it with a voiced alveolar affricate / $\widehat{dʒ}$ /))	1. "Har ja" ((means "anywhere"--pronounces it with a voiced alveolar affricate / $\widehat{dʒ}$ /))
2. Barikalla	2. Good job

Excerpt 4 (cnt'd)

3. Bechasb be hamun Farsi khundan ((utters in standard Farsi rather than Isfahani-accented Farsi))	3. Stick to singing in Farsi ((utters in standard Farsi))
4. To ro juni madered ((utters with Isfahani-accented Farsi))	4. I beg you ((literal translation: on your mother's life)) ((utters with Isfahani-accented Farsi))

At the beginning, right after he hears the first two words in Farsi, he starts repeating them; however, in his repetition he utters the word “ja” (meaning “place”) with a phonological marker that is associated with Isfahani-accented Farsi. This switch to a recognizable Isfahani accent is semiotically in line with how he was manipulating the artists’ quotes from the English section. That is, the language here is Farsi, and the Standard Farsi nonetheless, but to maintain the image constructed of the artists based on their non-standard speech YT2 decides to stylize the Farsi with Isfahani accent, a regional non-standard and ‘less prestigious’ Farsi. This is the only instance where YT2 is ‘voicing’ somebody with Isfahani accent; that is, throughout the video he only uses Isfahani accent when he is talking as himself and mostly when he is making a joke or trying to be silly. The “Good job” in line 2, shows mostly sarcasm rather than encouragement given what has been said before it and also what comes next, i.e. the authoritative command of ‘stick to singing in Farsi’. This command is uttered in Standard Farsi while the next sentence is in Isfahani-accented Farsi. The switch is functionally in line with the rest of the switches since it is again when he is trying to soften the preceding command through jokingly begging.

Forty seconds into the Farsi section of the song, YT2 stops the music video saying he “can’t keep watching this” and moves on to the comments posted on the video.

Excerpt 5

1. nemitunam nemitunam baba nemitunam ino bebinam	1. I can't I can't dude I can't (keep) watch(ing) this
2. hamash hamine	2. it's all the same
3. vali bacheha berim commenta ro bekhunim	3. but guys let's go read the comments
4. commenta khodast	4. (the) comments are the best
5. ina ro baratun bekhunam az khande miterekin ((all in Standard Farsi))	5. (if) I read these for you, you'll explode from laughter ((all in Standard Farsi))

Excerpt 5 is included here to show that YT2's evaluation of the whole music video was complete mostly by the end of the English section showing again his focus on artists' English in judging them and their product. In line 2, he says that "it's all the same" although he has not finished watching the music video (2:13-3:30 remains unwatched). He quickly moves to inviting his viewers, "guys" indexing an in-group, to check out the comments together. Lines 4 and 5 reveal YT2's implied expectation that both the commenters on the original music video *and* the viewers of his own video would be on the same page with him in both their evaluation of the music video and in their focus being on the artists' English.

Ending the reaction video

After he reads the comments, and actually 'likes' some of them and announces that he's liking them showing the act of 'liking' on the screen (which is taken to be explicit showing of alignments with other SM users), he ends the video by putting back the wig on in front of the camera and using stylized speech as follows:

Excerpt 6

1. Ok guys 2. tænk you 3. Dametun garm 4. Please tink about subeskeraribng 5. Berin un paein dokmeye sabeskerarib ro bezanin 6. I tink it vil be very good 7. Ok?↑ 8. Bara kolah gisamam ye “like” bezarin 9. Albatte kolah gis ke nist ke hehehe ((touches the wig)) 10. “like” yadetun nare 11. Dametun garm ((higher pitch, feminine mannerisms)) 12. Bia live 13. Have some chai	1. Ok guys 2. tænk ((“thank”)) you 3. you rock 4. Please tink ((“think”)) about subeskeraribng ((“subscribing”)) 5. Go to the bottom (of the video) hit the sabeskerarib ((“subscribe”)) button 6. I tink ((“think”)) it vil ((“will”)) be very good 7. Ok?↑ 8. Put a “like” for my wig too 9. Of course it’s not a wig (after all) hehehe ((touches the wig)) 10. Don’t forget to “like” 11. You rock ((higher pitch, feminine mannerisms)) 12. Come to live 13. Have some chai
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Excerpt 6 (cnt'd)

14. Va ta videoye badi ((shows the peace sign)) 15. peace 16. ((brings face close to the mic)) “don’t ever tink din di din din” ((moves back from the mic with a neck dance))	14. And until the next video ((shows the peace sign)) 15. peace 16. ((brings face close to mic)) “don’t ever tink din di din din” ((moves back from the mic with a neck dance))
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Right after he puts on the wig, he starts thanking the viewers and asking them to subscribe switching back and forth between English and Farsi and using stylized Farsi-accented English throughout: he replaces /θ/ with /t/ in “thank” and “think”, epenthesizes “subscribe” in two syllables (i.e. complete adaptation to Farsi phonology) and replaces /w/ with /v/ in “will”.

Through the wig, the higher pitch at some points, the feminine mannerisms, and most importantly the Farsi-accented English, he ‘voices’ Elnaz and the ‘type’ she represents in YT2’s idea: the migrant Iranian that is ‘unable’ to speak ‘good’ English and by portraying this on a transnational platform, i.e. YouTube, makes Iran and Iranians a ‘laughing stock’. This act of ‘voicing’ is completed by repeating the chorus of the song with Farsi accent (“don’t ever tink”) and doing the neck dance before the video ends.

Let us put this analysis into our chronotopic-scalar perspective again. Similar to what we saw with Excerpts 1 through 3, here too in Excerpts 4 through 6 we observe the three discursive strategies of ‘voicing’, assuming a ‘more-legitimate speaker’ position, and switching between Standard and Isfahani-accented Farsi. First, through quoting Hamid’s first Farsi words in the song in Excerpt 4 and using Isfahani-accented Farsi, which is the only time YT2 is using Isfahani accent *not* speaking as himself, he maintains the positioning of Hamid as the non-standard

speaker even in the Farsi section. More ‘voicing’ acts are observed as he is ending the video in Excerpt 6 where he is using stylized (non-standard) English switches, along with other semiotics, to impersonate the artists, specifically Elnaz and the ‘type’ she represents. In all of these voicing acts, he is orienting to Standard language normalcies through mocking the artists. Second, taking on the role of the ‘more legitimate’ English speaker is observed again through the sarcastic praise in Excerpt 4, line 2, as well as the authoritative command in line 3 of the same excerpt. This shows more explicit invocations of idealized standard norms. Finally, the switch to Isfahani-accented Farsi as a change in tone from serious to joking is again an instance of down-scaling, as we saw with the other instances of this type of switch, implicitly pointing to YT2’s orientations to higher-scale chronotopes of normalcy in evaluating the artists.

Next, we will see that YT2 considers this Farsi-accented English in the context of this music video as a threat to Iran’s image on a transnational level, an attitude which is in stark contrast with his stance towards the Farsi-accented English of his 1st-gen parents. I will demonstrate how the large scope of distribution of viral products plays an important role in the triggering of these types of orientations to higher-scale idealized normativities.

6.3.3.1.2. Virality and ‘our’ reputation at risk

Another recurring theme in YT2’s reaction video was his expressing concerns about the impact of this ‘bad’ production on Iran and Iranians’ image/reputation. There were two instances where this impact was discussed by YT2. The first instance happens at 3:08 of the reaction video where YT2 pauses the video and starts talking to the camera.

Excerpt 7

1. Faghat nemidunam to chejuri ma ro bordi	1. I just don't know how you ((sing.)) took us
2. number ten e terending page e YouTube	to the number ten on terending page in YouTube
3. <u>ino</u> tush mundam ((lines 1-3 in Isfahani accent))	2. I'm amazed by <u>this</u> ((lines 1-3 in Isfahani accent))
4. yani <u>har</u> videoyi ro entezar dashtam bere	3. (I) mean I would have expected <u>any</u> video
5. tu trending page be jo(hhh)z <u>in</u> be khoda ((in Standard Farsi))	4. to go to the trending page bu(hhh)t <u>this</u> I swear to god ((in Standard Farsi))
6. chera? ((chuckles))	5. Why?↑ ((chuckles))
7. chera? ((chuckles and shakes his head))	6. Why? ↑ ((chuckles and shakes his head))
8. chera? Alan kharejia fek mikonan ma	7. Why?↑ Now foreigners will think we
9. “ tink tink tink heart æye:i ” ((in Standard Farsi))	8. “ tink tink tink heart æye:i ” ((in Standard Farsi))
((slaps forehead and laughs))	((slaps forehead and laughs))

From the beginning of this excerpt, YT2 is putting himself opposite Elnaz, hypothetically addressing her through the deictic contrast: “I just don’t know how you took us...”. The “us” in line 1 refers not just to YT2, and maybe Elnaz, but to *all* Iranians, as a nation. This becomes clearer in line 8 where YT2 puts this “us” against “foreigners” or non-Iranians. From the start, then, YT2 is authenticating himself as an Iranian, building an in-group with the viewers and with all Iranians by extension, as he negatively evaluates Elnaz’s ‘achievement’ expressing his ‘shock’ of the virality of this video (lines 1 through 5). After repeating “why”, which parallels the beginning scene of this reaction video and shows his frustration, he more explicitly

elaborates on the negative impact of this music video on ‘our’ image: that non-Iranians will see this video and think all Iranians (“we”, line 8) are like Elnaz and Hamid by voicing them (“**“tink tink tink heart æye:ɪ”**”). In lines 8 and 9, no verb has been used after “we”, but it can be implied that he means “we all speak English this way”. Situating this within the scholarship that has been done on the language ideologies around English and the ‘good’ citizen/immigrant and/or neoliberal subject (see 6.2. above), it can be taken from lines 8 and 9 (“Now foreigners will think we **“tink tink tink heart æye:ɪ”**”), that the phonological markers become iconically linked to types (Agha, 2005; Irvine & Gal, 2000, 2009); that is, they become icons of ‘bad’ or ‘incompetent’ (migrant-)Iranians: we *speak* with a specific accent so we *are* the undesired ‘tink tink tink heart æye:ɪ’ type of people. I will elaborate on this type some more when discussing the comments posted on YT2’s video.

It is also worth noting the switching patterns throughout this excerpt as well. Lines 1 through 3 are in Isfahani-accented Farsi and we also see a nativized CS word (**terending**). There is a switch to Standard Farsi, however, from line 4 until the end. We also see that the same CS word that was used in line 2 in its nativized form (**terending**) is used here in line 5 in its Standard form (**trɛndɪŋ**). In line with the patterns observed earlier, then, we see that the non-standard Farsi is being used for humor while the Standard Farsi is reserved for expressing more serious concerns and frustrations. Additionally, we see consistent patterns of using standard and non-standard pronunciations: when speaking the non-standard Farsi YT2 uses a non-standard pronunciation for the CS word “trending”; on the other hand, when speaking Standard Farsi, he uses the standard pronunciation for the very same CS word.

The second instance where the music video’s impact on ‘our’ reputation is mentioned is at 5:43. While reading the comments many of which are about concerns over how this

production has a negative impact for Iran and Iranians' image, YT2 comes across one that sarcastically and jokingly talks about how Elnaz and Hamid are 'heroes' because they brought all Iranians together, pointing to the consensus about the 'bad' quality of the video and how 'all' SM users are talking about it across different platforms. YT2 translates the English comment into Farsi (using Isfahani-accented Farsi) and then switches to Standard Farsi and says the following:

Excerpt 8

1. ino mitunam begam ke true e ((smiling face, pointing index finger towards camera))	1. I can say that this is true ((smiling face, pointing index finger towards camera))
2. number ten on trending kheili chize	2. number ten on trending is a very
3. bozorgie bacheha↑ ((serious face, eyebrows raised, keeps waving the index finger))	3. big deal guys↑((serious face, eyebrows raised, keeps waving the index finger))
4. vaghean↑ hameye kharejia alan in video	4. for real↑, now all foreigners will see↑ this
5. ro mibinan↑ va hey mire bala o bala tar	5. video and it will go higher and higher (on the trending page)
6. bara man ke ta alan sisad-o-hashtad-o	6. for me it (shows that it) has three
7. yek hezar ta view dare	7. hundred-eighty-one thousand views so far
8. hala ta shoma berin bebinin hatman bishtaram dare	8. now by the time you also see it it will definitely have more
9. inkesho mizaram tu description	9. I'll put its link in the description
10. va in video ro ta inja ghat mikonam ke	10. And end this video here so that our
11. dige aberumun bishtar az in nare	11. reputation is not ruined any more than this

In line 1, he shows alignment with the commenter by confirming that he finds what the commenter said to be true. This is followed by assuming an authoritative position telling his audience who might not understand the ‘severity’ and the impact of this that this is “a very big deal” for ‘us’ Iranians. The switch from Isfahani accent to Standard Farsi again shows that he is trying to make a serious point here. This is also confirmed by the serious facial expression and him waving his finger at the camera. In line 4, he elaborates on the impact first by repeating once more in front of whom ‘our’ reputation will get ruined: “all foreigners”. Second, he mentions in lines 5 through 8 that as the video gets more and more viral it will be seen by more and more foreigners pointing to how the stakes will be higher as time goes by. Finally, the excerpt ends by his explicit invocation of the notion of ‘our’ reputation/image, or ‘face’ (translation of Farsi word “*aberu*”), assuming that it is already ruined because of the existence of this music video and showing his intentions of “not ruining it any more than this”. This is particularly interesting since because the reaction video itself is in Farsi and does not have subtitles, it most likely does not have a sizeable ‘foreigner’ viewership. Therefore, the statement is to, on the one hand, exaggerate the negative impact of this video and, on the other, position YT2 as a ‘better’ (migrant-)Iranian than the artists on the basis of his Standard English.

Putting the analysis into our chronotopic-scalar framework, we see two main discursive strategies employed by YT2 in discrediting the music video and the artists revealing his orientations to idealized chronotopes of normalcy again. First, through ideological processes of iconization and erasure (Irvine & Gal, 2009) in Excerpt 7 (“Now foreigners will think we “**tink tink tink heart æye:ɪ**””), he orients to Standard language as well as neoliberal ideologies. Second, when discussing the ‘consequences’ of ‘Just follow me’, he scales up from Elnaz and Hamid to “us”, the Iranian nation, on one hand and uses hyperbole in who will see this music

video and judge “us”, i.e. “all foreigners”, on the other. Through this up-scaling along with the explicit pointing to the virality, i.e. the large-scale distribution, of the video at several moments (e.g. Excerpt 7, lines 1-3, & Excerpt 8, lines 2-8), YT2 implicitly creates the image of the ‘ideal (migrant-)Iranian’ and justifies his portrayal of the artists as deviating from this image. In the next section focused on YT2’s viewers’ comments, we will see that the SM users also carry on this positioning self as ‘better’ Iranians and continue to more elaborately construct an image of Elnaz and Hamid as ‘bad’ (migrant-)Iranians.

6.3.3.2. The uptake

In the final section of the analysis for this chapter, I examine the comments posted on YT2’s video to 1) delve deeper into the dialogic and collective nature of the SM users’ identity work in performing their Iranianness and creating an idealized image of an (migrant-)Iranian based on Standard English, and 2) discuss how communication in the era of globalization and in the transnational digital media impacts the non-migrant Iranians as well as migrant ones creating a space for them to evaluate certain (migrant-)Iranian identities and reproduce and circulate certain language ideologies. The majority of the SM users who commented on YT2’s video identified themselves as Iranians with the exception of a few who were asking him for subtitles for his video stating that they were not Iranians and did not speak Farsi and hence could not understand the videos without subtitles. Moreover, an overwhelming majority (over 97%) of the Iranian commenters were showing alignment with YT2 through different discursive practices and metapragmatic evaluations. It is these alignment patterns that I would like to investigate in this section.

Similar to YT2’s focus in the video, the comments too were centered around the two themes of 1) normative judgements primarily based on the ‘bad’ English and 2) concerns about

the image of Iranians being at risk due to the virality of this video. The commenters would adopt a set of strategies that would allow them to create distance between themselves and the artists and negatively evaluate not only their language but their competence, intelligence, morality, transnationality, and above all, Iranianness.

One interesting strategy used in the alignment patterns was to use orthography and script as a resource for ‘voicing’ the artists similar to what YT2 was doing throughout the video (see also Chun, 2013 for such examples of voicing). A variety of orthographic practices including non-standard English orthography as well as English-Farsi transliteration were adopted for these acts of ‘voicing’. The practices were in a way that would accentuate the phonological markers discussed earlier (e.g. /v/ instead of /w/ and /t/ instead of /θ/) indexing an accent and in turn ‘abnormality’ and non-standardness. Examples of this are shown in the following table.

User	Comment	Description
SMuser13	(٩ نو مي دونت اور تينك تينك يو نو مي nine laughing-crying face emojis)	Transliteration of “you don’t know me don’t ever think think you know me”
SMuser14	(two ٩ نو هر پليز دونت جاججججججججججج two laughing-crying face emojis)	Transliteration of “you don’t know her please don’t judgggggggge”
SMuser15	YoU dErAyv Mi cereyzi	Non-standard orthography
SMuser16	Ai TiNK DiS sOnG dErivE mE KeReizY	Non-standard orthography

The first two examples show transliteration practices while the next two show non-standard orthography both as ‘misspellings’ (e.g. “KeReizy”) and/or using alternating capitalization (e.g. “sOnG”). SMusers 13 and 15 are mockingly repeating parts of the song directly quoting the artists using orthography. SMusers 14 and 16, on the other hand, are stylizing their own ‘speech’ assuming the artists’ ‘voice’ through orthographic practices. It is important to note the multilayered-ness of these practices; that is, at first the letter replacements in all examples above force the reader to acknowledge the phonological differences and ‘hear’ the accent. However, in an additional layer of complexity, the non-standardness and disruption of normalcy (in the case of transliteration, the language-script mismatch and in the case of non-standard English orthography, the spelling ‘errors’ and the alternating capitalization⁶²) index accented speech and ridicules them (see also Spilioti, 2019, 2020). Thus, we see through acts of orthographic ‘voicing’, the SM users, similar to YT2, are invoking Standardness as norm and orienting to idealized chronotopes of normalcy.

Invoking ‘local’ chronotopes of normativity

The second strategy for making evaluations and aligning with YT2 that was common across the comments was invoking images of EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching and learning contexts *within* Iran. This type of invocation was done through several ways. One was bringing in the hypothetical time-spaces of English classes, or teachers within these classes, situated within Iran under whose supervision Elnaz and Hamid had supposedly learned English. In such invocations, the teachers and/or courses would be delegitimized as educators with a joking or a serious tone. For example, one user had commented “we should see which English class she has

⁶² Urban Dictionary defines ‘Alternating caps’ as “the texting way of being sarcastic” (retrieved from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=aLtErNaTiNg%20CaPs>) (Last accessed 11/22/2021). Alternating caps has been used as an orthographic style to show mockery through texts.

attended (so that) we go and learn too (laughing-crying face emoji)”⁶³ negatively evaluating Elnaz’s English and delegitimizing the imaginary “English class” she attended through mock affect.

The EFL contexts were also invoked through mentioning certain training courses (in the form of CDs) that used to be famous in Iran at some point for their ‘promises’ and ‘guarantees’ but were considered ‘ineffective’ for language learning by many, e.g. “Learn English in 90 Days”. Such comments would sarcastically imply that the artists’ ‘bad’ English is due to their reliance on these types of courses for learning English. One comment, for instance, read “Bro she has learned these from Nosrat language learning CDs (three laughing-crying face emojis)”. Nosrat language learning, which started as a package of cassettes recorded for teaching English in the pre-social-media years, here indexes an ‘ineffective’ and outdated (i.e. the mention of CDs in the time where there are many other technologically advanced courses) method⁶⁴ which is jokingly blamed for Elnaz’s ‘bad’ English. Through these types of comments, the artists are also subtly evaluated as ‘lazy’ learners who do not go beyond easy-fixes and do not put ‘real’ effort into learning English. We see again, then, that through orienting towards larger-scale hegemonic chronotopes of normalcy, the image of ‘good neoliberal subject’ is invoked. This ideal neoliberal subject is one who is responsible for his/her own linguistic capital and makes a ‘real’ effort for self-improvement. The artists are morally evaluated through the lens of this idealized, and low-resolution, image as ‘bad’ neoliberal subjects whose ‘failure’ to speak ‘good’ English is their own fault as they did not put effort into learning it.

⁶³ Throughout this section, normal font shows Farsi in original and boldfaced shows English. I have not included the original Farsi comments to save space.

⁶⁴ It should be noted here that I am merely discussing some general attitudes towards Nosrat language learning method and how it has been used across several comments here; I am not offering an evaluation on my part. In fact, a quick look at the institute’s website (<https://nosratzaban.ir>) reveals that it has developed significantly since its inception (including different languages and different levels) and has kept up with the technological advances to some extent (e.g. having android and iOS applications).

The third strategy employed by SM users in their alignment with YT2 was their explicit or implicit reference to the artists' "Farsi accent". For instance, one comment was "they completely sang (in) Iranianized English (laughing-crying face emoji)" and another (originally in English) was "**The Persian accent that they have (rolling on the floor laughing emoji)**". Besides this explicit mentioning of the Farsi accent to mock the artists, however, there were comments that would take the 'stigma' of having an accent, i.e. any non-standard variety of a language, one step further. This was done through invoking 'local' ideologies associated with minority and stigmatized dialects/languages in Iran. That is, by juxtaposing English with certain languages and dialects that are stigmatized and subordinated (Bourdieu, 1991; Lippi-Green, 1997) in Iran, the SM users would create imagined 'even-less-prestigious varieties' of English. Through these cross-scalar connections, i.e. combining the transnational English with the local regional dialects, they would add another layer of devaluation to the English spoken in the music video portraying it not as just Farsi-accented but as 'doubly-accented'. One example of this was a, rather racist, comment that read "s/he sings English with Afghani accent (rolling on the floor laughing emoji)(rolling on the floor laughing emoji)". The emojis make the mocking tone of this comment rather obvious, but what is more interesting is the mention of "Afghani accent". Afghans speak a dialect of Farsi called Dari which has gone through a long and still-ongoing language subordination process within Iran where the dialect has been associated with less prestige, lower class, and un-educatedness. While the in-depth discussion of the status of Afghans and their dialect in Iran is beyond the scope of this dissertation, familiarity with the ideologies associated with Farsi Dari, aka Afghani Farsi, helps understand the evaluative judgement made in this comment. Through the double non-standardness, that is Afghani-Farsi-accented English, a stronger negative evaluation of the artists' speech and characters are made.

Note that these smaller-scale ‘local’ chronotopes, i.e. the EFL contexts and the local language ideologies, that the SM users are invoking are nested within, and fractally connected to, larger- and higher-scale chronotopes of normalcy. These chronotopes feed from hegemonic ideologies of Standardness, neoliberalism, and interestingly even nationalism in the case of the hypothetical ‘doubly-accented’ English. These negative and mocking attitudes towards different varieties of Farsi and different minority languages in Iran reveal the one-nation-one-language view that erases the ethnolinguistic diversity and highlights Standard Farsi as the only legitimate language (Bourdieu, 1991). We see how these smaller-scale time-spaces invoked are themselves operating within higher-scale normativities.

Standard English and the ‘good’ migrant

Another common strategy observed across the comments was legitimizing self as a ‘good’ or merely ‘better’ second language speaker of English, thus explicitly distancing self from the artists. One SM user’s comment, for instance, reads “I who have passed the TOEFL (exam) won’t dare to sing in English after this (laughing-crying emoji) (laughing-crying emoji) (laughing-crying emoji)”. In this comment, the SM user identifies him/herself as a legitimate second language speaker of English by mentioning the globally recognized standard proficiency test of TOEFL (Test Of English as a Foreign Language) and that s/he has passed it. The three emojis used at the end of the comment highlight this self-legitimization by exaggerating the sarcasm in the comment: although s/he is a ‘good’ speaker of English, evidenced by TOEFL which is considered a globally valid measure of linguistic competence, s/he won’t dare singing in English after watching the English spoken in this music video. Mentioning TOEFL also brings along images of ‘migration’ as it shows an intention to migrate specifically through the educational/skilled worker path (see Chapter 2). Additionally, the bringing up of the Standard

test implies that the SM user, unlike Elnaz and Hamid, has put money and effort into learning English. We see, therefore, that the SM user authenticates him/herself as a ‘good neoliberal subject’, and potentially a ‘good migrant’, not only through invoking TOEFL as the standard measure of English proficiency but also through implying that s/he has taken responsibility in self-betterment.

This legitimization of self was sometimes coupled with explicitly invoking images of migration and the prominence of English proficiency in being a ‘good’ migrant. For instance, an SM user had commented “they can’t even pronounce “think” we in Iran pronounce it correctly (laughing-crying emoji)”. Anchoring the comment in Iran, this user is clearly not a migrant and points to this difference between “they” and “we”, the non-migrants. The deictic contrast legitimizes “we” as better English speakers, and the surprise shown through “even” presupposes that “they” who are *not* in Iran, i.e. are migrants, should have ‘better’ English proficiency. This user, then, is in a sense delegitimizing the *migrant* identity of Elnaz and Hamid through the lens of English proficiency. Another similar comment that would explicitly mention migration was from a user who had commented “for real, what is she doing across the seas ((abroad)) she can’t even speak correctly like them (straight face emoji)”. Here again we have a spatial deictic (“across the seas”) that identifies Elnaz as a migrant and implies that the commenter is in Iran. In this comment, however, we have a more direct connection drawn between being a ‘good’ migrant and English proficiency. Two particularly interesting points here are the generalization of foreigners as “them” who “speak (English) correctly” on one hand and the fact that Elnaz and Hamid live and work in a non-English speaking country, i.e. the UAE, on the other. We see the erasure of linguistic diversity “across the seas”, assuming that the only legitimate language

spoken “there” is English. Finally, unlike the previous comment, this comment conveys a serious tone through the use of the straight face emoji.

This kind of overemphasis on the gatekeeping role of English in who is a ‘good’ migrant draws heavily from ideologies of English hegemony and neoliberalism and is in line with studies done on the role of English in migrants’ lives. These studies, however, were mostly done on contexts where the destination country was an English-speaking one (e.g. Warriner, 2016). In our case here, where the official language of the country the artists are living in is Arabic, this type of orientation to larger-scale and hegemonic normative images of migration can be explained through the concepts of ‘resolution’ and ‘chronotopization’. The commenter’s lack of access to the higher-resolution images of being a migrant in a non-English-speaking country, which come from first-hand experiences, paves the way for his/her recourse to larger-scale lower-resolution images of migration in his/her evaluation of the artists. To elaborate, not having lived, or probably visited, the UAE and not having had interactions with different people there this commenter does not know that most people living in the UAE, and any other non-English-speaking country for that matter, are second language speakers of English and that in these contexts non-standardness is in fact the norm. Orienting to the higher-scale chronotopes of normalcy, then, the commenter evaluates Elnaz’s English as out-of-norm and her being abroad as out-of-place. I will discuss this in more detail in 6.4 below.

While so far we have seen patterns of normative judgements evaluating the artists as ‘lazy’, ‘incompetent’, ‘uneducated’ people and most recently as ‘bad’ migrants, we will now move on to a very common evaluation across the comments that was born out of expressions of concern for Iran’s international reputation: evaluating the artists as ‘bad’ Iranians.

US ‘good’ Iranians vs. THEM ‘bad’ Iranians

The second theme that was highlighted in YT2’s video and was also repeatedly observed in the comments was the concern for the ‘ruined’ image of Iran and Iranians due to this ‘bad’ music video, and specifically their ‘bad’ English. In discussing these concerns, the SM users discursively constructed and claimed collective national identity as Iranians, migrant or non-migrant, by distancing themselves from these ‘bad’ Iranians who would put the image of the ‘nation’ at risk. There was an overwhelmingly large number of comments that would explicitly mention how this video caused “us” Iranians, and “our” country Iran, to lose “face”, “honor”, and “reputation”. Some of these comments are mentioned in Table 5.

Table 5 - Reputation/Image comments

User	Comment	Translation
SMuser17	خیلی بده که کسای احمقی مثل الناز گلرخ بیان و اینجوری آبروی کشورمون ایرانو ببرن جمع کنید این مسخره بازی رو ترو خدا تاسف هزار بار تاسف	It’s very bad that stupid people like Elnaz Golrokh come and ruin the reputation of our country Iran stop these ridiculous things for God’s sake disappointment a thousand times disappointment
SMuser18	آقا ریدن چیکار کنیم اینو یوتیوب برداره؟ ابرو کل ایرانیا رفت با این انگلیسیش. ریدیییییییی	Dude (they) screwed up what (should we) do (for) YouTube (to) removes this? The reputation of all Iranians

Table 5 (cnt'd)

		is gone with this (type of her) English. you screwed upppppppppp
SMuser19	دیگه میخواستن چیکار کنن آبروی یه ملت رو بردن (four man facepalming (emojis	What more did (they) wanna do (They caused) a nation to lose face (four man facepalming emojis)
SMuser20	its a shame for Iranian people what will world think of iran after seeing this video music	-
SMuser21	شرفمون رفت (smiling emoji)	Our honor is gone (smiling emoji)
SMuser22	#10 on trending makes it more embarrassing for us	-
SMuser23	آبروی ایران و بردن یه تنه (laughing-crying face (emoji	(they) single-handedly ruined Iran's reputation (laughing- crying face emoji)
SMuser 24	ابرو برای ما ایرانیا نداشتن اینو به خارجیا نشون بدیم به ما پناهندگی میدن	(they) haven't left us Iranians (any) reputation (if) we show this to foreigners (they) will offer us refuge

While a few of the comments shown in Table 5 seem to be more on the lighthearted side (e.g. SMuser23's), the majority of comments have a serious or sometimes sarcastic tone underlining the 'severity' of this video's consequences from the Iranian SM users' perspective. Across the comments, a set of discursive strategies can be observed that the SM users adopt to claim Iranian-ness and build collectivity and solidarity with YT2 and other SM users. Through these strategies, they ultimately negatively evaluate the artists portraying them as 'bad' Iranians and relatively positioning themselves as 'better' Iranians.

One of these strategies was the use of deictics ('us', 'we', 'our') and deictic contrast ('we' vs 'they'). For example, we see "our country" (SMuser17), "our honor" (SMuser21), "us Iranians" (SMuser24), etc., indexing a collective Iranian identity. We also see a positioning of 'us' against 'them' through deictic contrast: "(they) screwed up what (should we) do (for) YouTube (to) removes this?" (SMuser18) or "(they) haven't left us Iranians (any) reputation" (SMuser24). A similar use of deictics was seen in excerpts 7 and 8 from YT2's video. Besides the use of deictics, nationalistic ideologies were also frequently invoked through lexical choices like "nation" (SMuser19), "country" (SMuser17), "Iranian people" (SMuser20), "all Iranians" (SMuser18). There was even one comment that had mentioned the country's flag, a symbol of nationality, making a joke that "(they) put Iran's flag in bleach" implying again that our national honor has 'faded' because of this. Finally, somewhat similar to the pattern of creating an in-group of "all Iranians" or "us Iranians", there was also a parallel creating of an out-group that included Elnaz and Hamid, sometimes explicitly singling them out like SMuser23 ("(they) single-handedly ruined Iran's reputation (laughing-crying face emoji)"). These all show the SM users' orientations towards large-scale chronotopes of nationalism.

It is important to note, therefore, that while by accusing Elnaz and Hamid of “ruining Iran and Iranians’ reputation”, the SM users in fact acknowledge the artists’ Iranian identity; it is the moral judgements and the differentiation acts that allow them to position the artists as ‘bad’ Iranians and themselves as ‘good’ ones. In other words, the “we”, Iranians who care about the nation’s image, in the comments in Table 5 is a generic “we” that includes the commenters, YT2, and other Iranians, excluding Elnaz and Hamid, the ‘bad’ Iranians. In fact, across the comments while the normative judgements that were largely based on the artists’ ‘bad’ English were associating them with a variety of undesired characteristics, such as “stupid”, “uneducated”, “illiterate”, “fraud”, “fame-seeking wannabes”, etc., the collective portrayal of the artists seemed to be as ‘bad’ Iranians. They are ‘bad’ Iranians because they would put a “nation’s” image at risk out of their incompetence, stupidity, or for selfish fame-seeking desires. Note, however, that the artists’ Iranianness that is being evaluated is also spatiotemporally situated within a migration context.

This distancing and differentiation can be seen in full force in Iranian SM users’ comments under a few reaction videos that were done by *non*-Iranian YouTubers of this music video (e.g. YT6 in Table 5). Under the video posted by YT6⁶⁵, there were a large number of commenters that were (a) ‘apologizing as Iranians’ saying that they are “ashamed” of this video (e.g. **“As an Iranian, I’m sorry”**, **“I’m so sorry from side all Iranian for this music”**⁶⁶, **“I’m**

⁶⁵ YT6 is an African-American male who uploads his reactions to different videos on his YouTube page. In his reaction video to “Just follow me”, he does not mention anything about the way the artists spoke English. His overall evaluation seems to be ambiguous (“I don’t know how I feel about this song”), but more on the negative side (“is this a real music video?”). For the most part of the video, he was mentioning that he was “confused” about what was going on in the music video, who the artists were, and what the other language they were singing was. He was asking his viewers to give him some more information about the video and the artists. He also made a few positive comments about the artists’ appearance (e.g. “she cute though”).

⁶⁶ An interesting point to look at in future research is how the linguistic practices of the commenters themselves are sometimes in conflict with their metapragmatic evaluations. In this specific comment, for example, the SM user has directly translated a sentence from Farsi (instead of ‘on behalf of’ s/he says ‘from side’) which does not make sense. In many of the comments that are posted in English under the reaction videos, there are several deviations from

Iranian and very very soo sorry about this.....”, “I am so embarresed to be Iranian I apologize because of what you saw. Ignore it”, etc.), and (b) highlighting the in-group/out-group differentiation and positioning the artists as ‘bad’ Iranians and themselves and others as ‘good’ Iranians (e.g. “(laughing-crying emoji)sorry its farsi, im sorry, iranians are good people”, “These two just made all Iranians ashamed i promise we are better than this”, “We are not like this . (5 laughing-crying emojis) believe me .”, “I know this video you made is right but really Iranians are not that stupid really”, etc.). There were some comments that were doing both of (a) and (b) above while also singling out the artists’ English (e.g. “Im iranian and I know them. We are so sorry about their pronunciations.....(expressionless face emoji)”, “Hi bro .they are Iranian. she is make up artist.they are uneducated and they can not speak English well (...)”, etc.). Perhaps, the most telling of them all was a comment made by SMuser25:

SMuser25’s comment:

Iranians don’t make such contents and they are not uneducated, this two just ruined our image and we don’t consider them as one of us anymore. Just don’t take them serious, whole Persian nation is laughing at them.

The message in this comment is taken up by YT6 as he replies: “@SMuser25 damn y’all all disowned them?”. SMuser25 replies back: “@YT6 yes, you can read Iranians comments on their mv ((music video)). they embarrassed us just for money and disrespected us (...)”.

This back and forth shows that apparently Elnaz and Hamid are “disowned” by SMuser25 and, according to the deictic “us” in his/her reply and “y’all all” in YT6’s reply, by *all* Iranians

Standard at different linguistic levels (i.e. structural, orthographic, etc.). The same goes for even some of the Farsi comments as they use non-standard orthography. I will discuss this type of discrepancy between practice and positionings in the next chapter.

because they “embarrassed” and “disrespected” Iranian people.

To sum up, examining the comments space under YT2’s reaction video reveals, similar to YT2’s reactions, the commenters’ orientations to larger-scale idealized chronotopes of normalcy that feed from neoliberal ideologies, Standard language ideologies, and nationalistic ideologies. We see again the emergence and solidification of the image of an ‘ideal (migrant-)Iranian’ that was created in YT2’s video through these orientations: an ‘ideal (migrant-)Iranian’ is one who has put real effort into, and succeeded in becoming, a ‘native-like’ Standard English speaker and does not put the nation’s image at risk in front of ‘foreigners’ for his/her own purposes or out of ignorance. We observed SM users’ evaluations of the artists as ‘bad’ (migrant-)Iranians through this lens. Another important point from the comments section is that it shows how not only migrants (i.e. people like YT2) but also non-migrants participate in constructing and circulating this idealized image highlighting how transnationality, experiencing it and evaluating it, concerns both physically ‘mobile’ and ‘non-mobile’ social actors (cf. Dick, 2010). More in-depth and detailed discussion can be found in section 6.4.

6.4. Discussion

In this chapter, I delved into a specific large-scale context of virality where (migrant-)Iranianness was evaluated by Iranian SM users. In section 6.3.1, I showed how an Iranian English-Farsi music video had gone viral mostly because of its perceived ‘bad’ quality, and specifically due to the ‘bad’ English spoken by the artists. I discussed the music video itself and pointed out the non-standard instances of English speech in the verses, specifically focusing on the phonological adaptation of some English words to Farsi which rendered the song ‘Farsi-accented’ (see Table 2). In section 6.3.3, I focused on a specific genre of YouTube videos, i.e. reaction videos, to investigate the responses that this viral music video has received. I particularly focused my

attention on a reaction video made by a 2nd-gen migrant Iranian YouTuber, i.e. YT2, and discussed how through different discursive-evaluative acts (e.g. voicing, deictic contrasts, code-switches, etc.), YT2 created an idealized image of an (migrant-)Iranian who speaks ‘accent-less’ Standard English. I illustrated how through this image YT2 positioned the artists as ‘bad’ (migrant-)Iranians and himself as a ‘better’ one. I also traced the uptake and solidification of this ideal image in the comments posted on YT2’s reaction video in section 6.3.3.2. I demonstrated that both migrant and non-migrant SM users used a set of strategies (e.g. voicing through orthography, invoking ‘local’ chronotopes, etc.) to show alignments with YT2 and portray the artists as the anti-ideal (migrant-)Iranian.

I demonstrated that this idealized image of a ‘good (migrant-)Iranian’ was collectively constructed, by both YT2 and the viewers, through orientations to higher-scale chronotopes of normalcy feeding from Standard language ideologies, neoliberal ideologies, and nationalistic ideologies. I argue for two reasons why in this context the SM users oriented to such chronotopes. First, because of the virality, wide circulation, and visibility of the music video, the Iranian viewers of the video knew that, as a trending YouTube video, it would be seen by many non-Iranians. They also speculated that these non-Iranians would most likely have general low-resolution images of Iran and Iranians themselves, constructed through interactions with high-scale mass-mediated chronotopes (e.g. Iranians as backwards, overly religious, poor, uneducated, etc.) and are more likely to evaluate these through those images and generalize their evaluations to *all* Iranians. We observed expressions of these concerns in both YT2’s reaction video (i.e. Excerpts 7 & 8) as well as the SM users’ comments (e.g. SMuser22 in Table 5). More important than the wide circulation, however, is that many SM users, i.e. YT2 and many of his viewers, did not themselves have access to high-resolution images of (younger) 1st generation migrant

Iranians.

In the case of YT2, this inaccessibility becomes very apparent if one compares his stance towards the Farsi-accented speech of his 1st-gen parents, in the comedy skits mentioned before, and his attitude towards the artists' similar Farsi-accented speech⁶⁷. While the parents' speech is evaluated as funny but endearing, the artists' is evaluated as ridiculous and disgraceful. In his evaluation of the parents' speech, YT2 orients to smaller- and lower-scale chronotopes of lived experiences. That is, because of his being socialized into a migrant Iranian family growing up, he has chronotopic images of his interactions with his parents, or of the parents' interactions with other 1st-gen migrant Iranians, that are very semiotically detailed. In other words, YT2 has high-resolution images of certain 1st-gen migrant Iranians (e.g. older, more on the conservative and traditional side, etc.) and the 'exact' 'natural' way they speak English. However, this high-resolution image does not apply to all migrant Iranians, and we see that it does not apply to the artists here. In evaluating Elnaz and Hamid, YT2 lacks high-resolution images for these types of 1st-gen migrant Iranians (i.e. younger, more modern, more liberal with their appearances, etc.) and thus has no option but to draw from his low-resolution idealized images that have been developed through interactions with large-scale, usually mass-mediated, chronotopes of normalcy, i.e. those of Standardness and the ideal neoliberal subject specifically. Therefore, notions of chronotopization (history) and (chronotopic) resolution can account for his conflicting sociolinguistic evaluations of the same phonological features.

In the case of the SM users, specifically the ones that could be identified as non-migrants, their orientations to dominant chronotopes can also be explained through the above-mentioned notions. That is, given that the non-migrant Iranians have been living in Iran and probably have

⁶⁷ I have mentioned in section 6.3.3.1 that the Farsi-accented speech of both the parents and the artists shared similar phonological features (e.g. epenthesis, replacing /w/ with /v/, etc.)

had limited transnational mobility as tourists⁶⁸, the image that they have at their disposal, of a migrant who is a second language speaker of English, and specifically lives in a non-English speaking ‘host’ country (like the UAE where the artists live), is of low resolution. This means that due to the lack of interactions with such people and such contexts, the high-resolution images of these migrants that develop from first-hand experiences with them, are not available in the non-migrant SM users’ repertoires. What is available are the low-resolution images that have been developed through interactions with hegemonic ideologies and large-scale mass-mediated chronotopes of normalcy in their chronotopization histories, for instance in EFL classes where Standard is emphasized, and native-like speech is aspired to. The consequence of drawing on these low-resolution images is the emergence and solidification of the idealized ‘good’ (migrant-)Iranian and evaluating the artists as ‘bad’ Iranians.

As such, we see that a chronotopic-scalar approach provides the analytical tools to capture the nuances of social media communication regarding its polycentricity and transnationality. While YT2 and the non-migrant Iranians showed alignment with one another in their evaluations of the artists, basing their evaluations on the same phonological features that marked the artists’ English as Farsi-accented, the trajectory through which they got to this similar evaluation are different. I demonstrated that both the convergence of their evaluation and the divergence of how they get there can be accounted for by notions of resolution and chronotopization. Note, as well, that while the ‘Iranian’ identity of the artists, rather than explicitly their *migrant* Iranian identity, is targeted over most of the comments, the identity is situated in the time-space of diaspora⁶⁹. Therefore, it can be said that the SM users’ moral

⁶⁸ According to the Henley Passport Index, Iranian passport has been ranked 107 (among 116 ranks) in its global mobility in 2021 (retrieved from <https://www.henleyglobal.com/passport-index/ranking>). (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

⁶⁹ This was clearly seen in the comments positioning them as ‘bad’ migrants as well.

judgements of the artists' 'Iranianness', is also influenced by the fact that they are migrants. For this reason, I argue that it is specifically their (migrant-)Iranianness that is targeted for evaluation through the lens of Standard English. In fact, the Standard English becomes a relevant and essential criterion for evaluation because the context of evaluation is 'transnational'. The standard norms of English phonology (i.e. 'text') get indexically linked to the idealized image of a 'good' (migrant-)Iranians, a personhood situated within a specific context. This chronotopic-scalar nature of the constructed idealized image would become more clear and salient in Chapter 7 when I discuss the emergence of another idealized image of a 'good' Iranian based on *Standard Farsi* and on a more 'national'/'local' scale.

CHAPTER 7: ORTHOGRAPHY AND CONSTRUCTING/CONTESTING THE IMAGE OF A ‘GOOD’ IRANIAN

7.1. Introduction

The final analysis chapter of this dissertation discusses sociolinguistic normativity, and its chronotopic organization, more explicitly through focusing on a new non-standard online Farsi orthographic norm, i.e. ‘hekasreh’, and its standard ‘offline’ counterpart. I delve into SM users’ online debates around this norm and examine how in their positionings they negotiate, and contest, certain normative images of Iranianness.⁷⁰ While the previous two chapters were more concerned with the utility of the notions of chronotopization and resolution in understanding online identity work, this chapter demonstrates the usefulness of a chronotopic-scalar approach in carefully investigating the *polycentricity* of users’ orientations/practices and the *argumentative nature* of their identity work. In Chapters 5 and 6, my focus was on constructions and authentications of migrant-Iranianness, and ‘good’ (migrant-)Iranianness, through collaborative identity work, but here I look at a context of construction *and* contestation. I particularly look at the construction of yet another idealized image of a ‘good’ Iranian by some SM users through their orientations to idealized hegemonic chronotopes. This one, however, is ‘locally’ situated and is based on Standard *Farsi* orthography. Moreover, I also demonstrate how this constructed image gets contested by some other SM users through their orientations to differently-scaled chronotopes in their counter-argumentations. Since the topic of interactions is in fact normativity itself (i.e. the orthographic norm of ‘hekasreh’), we see more clearly how normativities of form get indexically linked to normativities of contexts, and the identities therein.

⁷⁰ A large part of this chapter has been published in Sanei, T. (2021). Normativity, power, and agency: On the chronotopic organization of orthographic conventions on social media. *Language in Society*, 1-28. doi:10.1017/S0047404521000221

Therefore, this chapter nicely brings together and adds to what we have observed in the other analysis chapters. First, it shows SM users' orientations to both larger-scale and smaller-scale chronotopes in their arguments for or against one specific orthographic norm and examines the 'power differentials' within chronotopic identity work. I also demonstrate the creating, and contesting, of an idealized image of a 'good' Iranian, scaled 'locally', through the lens of this norm and elaborate on the nuanced differences between this 'local' ideal image and the 'transnational' ideal image, that we observed in Chapter 6, using resolution and chronotopization. Moreover, I emphasize that while the image is situated at a 'local' scale, the processes through which the image is created/contested and used can be through orienting to a variety of local or transnational chronotopes, rendering 'transnationality' still relevant. Finally, the chapter adds to my findings from the previous chapters as it looks into sociolinguistic normativity in the *online-offline nexus* by taking as its focus a non-standard online variation of a standard (offline) orthographic norm whose use has been seeped back into the offline contexts. This is different from Chapter 5 and 6, which focused on Internet-specific devices (i.e. memes and YouTube videos), in that the link between online and offline sociolinguistic normativity is more obvious. Particularly, I show how a chronotopic-scalar approach helps in understanding the interactions between online and offline spaces through taking into consideration the links across differently-scaled online and offline chronotopes in analyzing online communication.

In section 7.2 below, I provide a brief background on the research done with regard to orthography as identity work especially in online communication. I explain the 'hekasreh' phenomenon in 7.3.1 and present several tweets that argue for or against 'hekasreh' along with their detailed analysis in the rest of section 7.3. I conclude the chapter by section 7.4 summarizing the findings and discussing how they address the research question(s) this chapter

was based on.

7.2. Orthography and Identity Work on Social Media

One aspect of social media that is of particular interest in sociolinguistics is, not surprisingly, the written mode of communication. Sociolinguistics of orthography suggests that, unlike earlier views of orthography as neutral and pure mechanics, orthography and script are ideologically loaded (Sebba, 1998, 2012; Jaffe, 1996, 2012; Johnson, 2002). As a seminal work in the field, Sebba's (1998) study, for example, discusses how British Creole writers' orthographic practices reveal their underlying attitudes towards Standard English and create a venue for them to perform different acts of identification (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005): the writers of Caribbean origin use non-standard spellings in order to distance themselves from British English and index independence. In other words, orthographic practices can be viewed and investigated as identity work. While many earlier studies in sociolinguistics of orthography focused on standard orthography, orthographic reform, and issues of identity, using mainly a top-down institutional approach (e.g. Johnson, 2000, 2002, 2012; Sebba, 2007, 2009), more recent studies have focused their research on orthography as identity work in social media contexts (Androutsopoulos, 2012; Drackley, 2018; Gleason, 2016; Hillewaert, 2015; Schulthies, 2014; Sherman & Švelch, 2015). These studies look at issues of identity through investigating social actors' script choice, non-standard spellings, and new orthographic practices as well as by studying their metalinguistic debates on online and offline orthography. While numerous studies have been done on the online orthography of different communities and languages, there seems to be a lack of research on the sociolinguistic behavior of Iranian social media users in general and their orthographic practices in particular hence calling for more investigation on Iranian communities (cf. Karimzad & Sibgatullina, 2018).

To situate this in the context of Iran and Farsi orthography, some general online non-standard orthographic norms among Iranians should be mentioned. With the rise of online communication, and especially on social media, a variety of new orthographic practices have emerged among which are: Finglish (Writing Farsi words with Roman alphabet or Farsi-English transliteration), reversed Finglish (Writing English words with Farsi alphabet or English-Farsi transliteration), abbreviations (e.g. خخخ /xxx/ to mean ‘lol’; or the letter ج for جواب which means ‘answer’, etc.), inconsistent violations of standard spelling (i.e. spelling ‘mistakes’), and consistent patterns of violation of standard orthographic rules (sometimes for specific reasons such as to bypass the filtering of certain taboo words or to make some words ‘un-searchable’). ‘hekasreh’, the focus of this paper, is a particular instance of this last practice. One final note to be made before delving into the data and analysis is that due to the government blocking of Twitter, users inside Iran can access Twitter only through anti-filter VPN services that hide their IP addresses and/or show a different location (e.g. European countries) for them. This, therefore, makes it almost impossible to know the location of the tweeters with certainty even through obtaining IP addresses from data analytics services. However, based on my online and offline ethnographic observation, and also as observed in the content of a large number of the tweets (e.g. posted images of instances of the new non-standard ‘hekasreh’ on local billboards, public signs, local products, National TV programs, local celebrities’ social media, etc.), it appears that much of the ‘hekasreh’ discussion is taking place inside Iran. I elaborate more on possible reasons why this is the case in section 7.4.

7.3. Data Analysis

7.3.1. The ‘hekasreh’ phenomenon

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Farsi follows a modified version of Arabic script. The alphabet is

written from right to left and consists of 32 characters which represent consonants and long vowels. The short vowels (/æ/, /e/, and /o/) in most cases, for example if not word-final and not representing certain free morphemes, are represented through diacritics, rather than alphabetic letters, (Baluch 2006) that are often left out in everyday written communication. ‘hekasreh’ revolves around two orthographic rules related to the short vowel /e/. In standard Farsi orthography, there are two cases in which the sound /e/ is represented in two *different* ways and fulfills two *different* grammatical functions: first is where /e/ is shown through the connecting letter /v/ to represent the spoken form of the verb ‘to be’ in 3rd person singular (i.e. ‘is’); and second is where it is represented through the diacritic called ‘kasreh’ shown as ‘َ’ (i.e. a short slant line that is put below letters) used in Ezafe⁷¹ construction. Application of these two rules can be seen in Example 1 where the two cases of /e/ (i.e. ‘is’ and Ezafe) are shown through an underline and an arrow respectively. Note that Farsi is written from right to left.

Example 1

این دختر باهوش پرستاره.					
in	dokhtær	e	bahush	pæræstar	<u>e</u>
		↙			
this	girl	-	smart	nurse	is

This smart girl is a nurse.

These two rules are in complementary distribution. In the recent years, however, users on social media have started to consistently deviate from the standard rule in their online written texts, either reversing/swapping the two rules or overusing the first rule (i.e. using the letter /v/ to represent both ‘is’ and Ezafe). Example 2 shows the different possibilities of ‘hekaseh’ use.

⁷¹ Ezafe, a morpheme with the phonological representation /e/, is used to add adjectives to nouns, nouns to nouns, etc. (for a detailed review of Ezafe construction see Larson & Yamakido 2008)

Example 2

Standard ‘hekasreh’		این دختر باهوش پرستاره.
New (online)	Reversing	این دختره باهوش پرستار.
‘hekasreh’	Overusing	این دختره باهوش پرستاره.

This smart girl is a nurse.

The emergence of the non-standard ‘hekasreh’ has sparked debates on social media, especially Twitter, which are tagged by a variety of hashtags the most trending of which is #هکسره (i.e. #hekasreh pronounced as /hekæsre/). This hashtag was first used on April 6, 2016 in a tweet criticizing the innovation. It is worth mentioning that while there had been continuous debates regarding this innovative orthographic practice very early on after its emergence, ‘hekasreh’ has been receiving a recent extreme attention as a result of its seeping into the offline platforms (e.g. commercial billboards, National Television’s subtitles, etc.). This online-offline dialogue provides ever more reasons to closely examine this new norm and the attitudes and positionings toward it in order to gain an insight into online/offline sociolinguistic normativity.

While my online ethnography was done across platforms, I have focused on Twitter in this chapter and for the debates around ‘hekasreh’. Starting May 2016 to March 2019, I compiled a dataset of 2,000 unique (re)tweets publicly posted and tagged with #هکسره (i.e. #heksasreh). Among these, 300 tweets that represented the general alignment/disalignment patterns across the dataset were selected for more careful examination. The majority of tweets were in textual format (i.e. without images or videos) and in Farsi using either Farsi script or Finglish. There were, however, some tweets that contained memes, images, GIFs, etc. and there were a few that were in English with the Farsi hashtag #هکسره. The (meta-)linguistic and (meta-)semiotic practices of the SM users (e.g. different orthographic practices, (dis)alignment patterns, deictics,

images posted, etc.) were carefully examined to unveil the polycentricity in their orientations and how these would manifest in their actual practices.

7.3.2. Polycentricity and the negotiation of authority in the online-offline nexus

In this section, I present data from the tweets collected around the ‘hekasreh’ debate along with a detailed analysis of each tweet. Through Figures 10 through 15, I demonstrate the SM users’ positionings towards, and evaluations of, ‘hekasreh’ focusing on their orientations to different centers and invocation of differently-scaled chronotopes. In these invocations, I trace the creation of an idealized image of a ‘good’ Iranian, indexically linked to ‘hekasreh’, by some users and how other users contest this image. I further elaborate on the argumentative nature of the invoked chronotopes in Figures 16 through 21 illustrating the power dynamics in ‘hekasreh’ Twitter debates using a chronotopic-scalar approach.

7.3.2.1. Policing ‘hekasreh’ and the construction of the ‘good’ Iranian

Three different tweets posted by different SM users are presented in this section. The common theme among the three pieces of data is users’ orientation to traditional centers of authority such as literature, nationalism, or standard language ideologies –*chronotopes of tradition* (Blommaert 2015) – in their evaluation of new ‘hekasreh’ and its followers. Throughout the analysis, I trace the emergence of an idealized iconic image (Agha 2005; Irvine & Gal 2000, 2009), the ‘good Iranian’, which the users who police ‘hekasreh’ construct through their chronotopic work and use as a lens to illegitimize the practices and identities of the followers of the new ‘hekasreh’. The first tweet to consider is presented in Figure 10. In this tweet #هکسرہ refers to the prescribed standard rule itself.



Figure 10 – Tweet#1 (SMuser26)

SMuser26 appears to be reacting to someone’s tweet/comment/post about Hafez and his poetry in which the user had violated standard ‘hekasreh’. What is being invoked is a literary figure, a poet from the distant past⁷². Hafez symbolizes a particular figure of personhood (Agha 2005) situated in the time-space of Traditional Iran that is associated with authenticity and correctness. The tweet is written in the imperative form which illustrates how SMuser26 distances him/herself from the new-‘hekasreh’-follower and in fact takes an authoritative position, especially that the structure has singular “you” conjugation which, combined with the overall tone of the tweet, is read as condescending. Through this imperative (*First, follow the #hekasreh (rule)...*), SMuser26 implies that not following the standard ‘hekasreh’ disqualifies this specific person from commenting on Hafez’s poetry.

This type of invocation of tradition through invoking different classical poets was very common across the dataset. They all revealed a similar pattern: the majority of them were reactions to other users’ reciting of, or comments on, these poets’ poetry while following non-

⁷² Hafez is a world-renowned Iranian poet from the 14th century.

standard ‘hekasreh’ in their tweets. In many such reaction tweets, this authenticity and correctness brought along by the invocation of classical poetry would become entangled with nationalistic discourses together creating an iconic image of a ‘good Iranian’ as someone who knows Farsi literature *and* follows standard orthographic rules, ‘hekasreh’ included. Particularly, numerous tweets would invoke Ferdowsi, the 9th century Iranian poet who is very closely associated with nationalist discourses and the ‘purification’ of Farsi (see Kia 1998). One user, for instance, had tweeted: *Follow the #hekasreh (standard rule) for now, no need (for you) to congratulate Ferdowsi’s commemoration day*⁷³. Note the parallel discursive structure of this and Tweet 1 (and later Tweet 2). These examples show how SM users who violate the standard ‘hekasreh’ get portrayed as deviating from the constructed image of the ‘good Iranian’ and as people whose comments on Farsi literature are illegitimate.

Tweet 1 also reveals further complexity as we see a mismatch between the metapragmatic commentary and the SM user’s actual linguistic/orthographic practices. One such mismatch is SMuser26’s crude, even obscene, word choice (*cunt* and *pimp*) while s/he orients toward a center of authority (i.e. literature) that is closely linked with the notion of tradition and properness. The second, more interesting, mismatch is his/her deviation from a certain standard orthographic practice: while standard ‘hekasreh’ is being followed, s/he is violating another orthographic practice by deliberately using a non-standard spelling for the word *cunt* (writing **کص** instead of **کس** both pronounced as /kos/). This is interesting because **#کص** has recently been a trending hashtag on social media. This new way of writing this word in Farsi might have originally started to bypass the filters and censorship around the search for sexual and taboo words on the Internet from inside Iran. It has also more recently been used by social media users

⁷³ Throughout the analysis, the extra examples that I have incorporated in the body of the analysis, rather than in separate excerpts, are all originally in Farsi. Regular font shows Farsi while boldfaced shows English.

to index less impoliteness and less obscenity while using the word. In other words, by changing the last letter of the word to a different letter that represents the same sound (i.e. /s/), users have resisted filtering and also made it more ‘normal’ to use this previously-obscene word online. Thus, we see the SM user’s simultaneous orientation to traditional centers of authority as well as centers of resistance. That is, even in SMuser26’s perception, not all non-standard orthographic norms are invalid as is evident in his/her intentional misspelling of the word ‘cunt’. S/he is in fact using a *specifically online* practice (writing كص) and seems to be orienting away from traditional centers that s/he just invoked. What differentiates this from the case of ‘hekasreh’, however, is that the understanding of the pragmatic and metapragmatic function of orthography in this case is not solely linguistic, as is the case with ‘hekasreh’, but sociopolitical, i.e. resisting the top-down filtering practice in terms of both content and language. Therefore, what norms and the act of ‘deviating from norms’ imply is changed based on the context or is, in other words, chronotopic.

While Tweet 1 and other similar examples bring in traditional Farsi literature and connect that to nationalist discourses and the ‘hekasreh’, some others, like Tweet 2, draw more directly on national identity and its perceived connection to standard Farsi through specific hegemonic ideologies. In the following example, the iconic image of the ‘good Iranian’ is created by invoking the Persian Gulf, which is connected to strong nationalist and patriotic sentiments. We will also see how this sense of patriotism gets linked to concerns about preserving the Farsi language. In Tweet 2, #هکسرده refers to the violation of the standard rule which is seen in the image posted by another tweeter and retweeted here by SMuser27.



Figure 11 - Tweet#2 (SMuser27)

You Don't destroy the Farsi language (!) ((an imperative with the pronoun to add emphasis)), no need (for you) to sorrow over the Persian Gulf.
#hekasreh

(the written part superimposed on the picture of the Gulf reads "The forever Persian (Gulf)" using the new 'hekasreh' practice (همیشه فارس instead of همیشه‌گی فارس).)

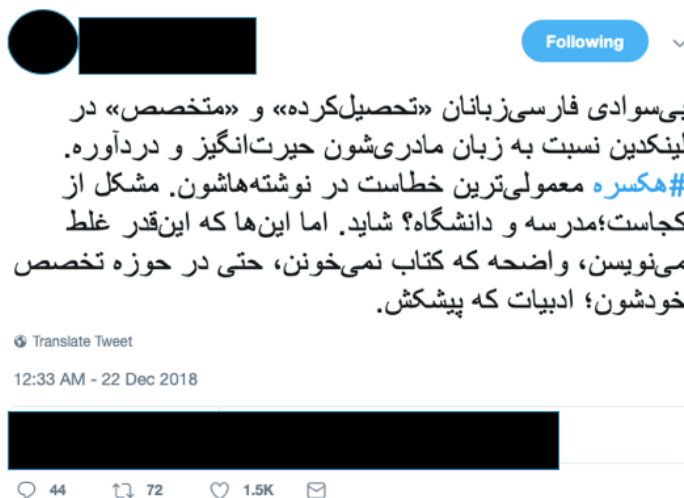
SMuser27, like SMuser26, is using an imperative and directly addressing the new-'hekasreh'-follower taking an authoritative position. The imperative here is more forceful, however, due to the use of the emphatic pronoun (i.e. you (plural), شما pronounced as /ʃoma/) and its mismatch in number-agreement with the verb (i.e. Don't destroy (singular) داغون نکن pronounced as /daqun nækon/) that adds an extra layer of differentiation. This structure is not an uncommon one in Farsi and its most common function is to create distance. Besides the distance, s/he illegitimizes the ethnolinguistic identity of the other SM user whose posted image s/he has retweeted. SMuser27 does this in two ways: First, in the tweet, not following the standard 'hekasreh', shown both through the hashtag and through the image retweeted, is being equated with *destroying the Farsi language*. This is followed by the mention of The Persian Gulf addressing the message in the picture (*The forever Persian (Gulf)*) and implicitly invoking the global disputes and patriotic sentiments around the name of the Persian Gulf. These global disputes

revolve around the disagreement regarding the name of this body of water. Specifically, although this body is historically known as the Persian Gulf, in 1960s and with the emergence of Arab nationalism, several Arab countries started adopting the name Arab Gulf or Arabian Gulf which raised disputes between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. Throughout the years, the disputes have become increasingly more contentious extending to, and having consequences in, the global scales (see Levinson 2011). Not surprisingly, Iranians express very strong patriotic sentiments over this global naming dispute which is evident in the image retweeted (*The forever Persian (Gulf)*). SMuser27, therefore, draws on the one-nation-one-language ideology by bringing in and making a connection between the (standard) Farsi language and the Persian Gulf, a symbol of national pride and identity. Through this invocation, s/he creates an iconic image of a ‘good nationalist Iranian’, one who follows standard ‘hekasreh’ and hence does not *destroy* the language and additionally cares about the name of the Persian Gulf. Through this iconic image, then, SMuser27 negatively evaluates the new-‘hekasreh’-follower and his/her practices disqualifying him/her from making patriotic statements.

There were many similar examples connecting following the standard ‘hekasreh’ directly and explicitly to ‘being Iranian’. One SM user, for instance, had replied to another user, who had written a comment mockingly criticizing typical ‘Iranian’ behavior (*any/every Iranian (is) a master of confidently giving uninformed advice*) but violating standard ‘hekasreh’ in his/her tweet. The reply was *But every/any Iranian has to know the #hekasreh (standard rule) :|* pointing out the SM user’s violation of standard ‘hekasreh’ and directly drawing a connection between ‘being an Iranian’ and following standard ‘hekasreh’. The negative evaluation is made salient especially through the straight-face emoticon (:|) which shows his/her irritated tone. Another user had tweeted (*I wish that these battles (over ‘hekasreh’) yield a result at least and Iran and*

Iranians don't see a trace of #hekasreh (ever) again invoking images of 'war' and 'fighting for your country' and thus national identity. Perhaps the most salient of all was a user who had tweeted *An Iranian is one who follows #hekasreh*, putting following standard 'hekasreh' as the gateway for 'being Iranian' and discrediting the 'Iranianness' of those who do not. All these examples show the construction of the idealized image of a 'good Iranian' pointing to how following standard Farsi orthography gets connected to ethnolinguistic and national identity through their chronotopic work.

The last excerpt in this section provides us with a more specific scope as we see the image gets more nuanced in SMuser28's chronotopic work. The #هکسره in this tweet refers to the violation of standard 'hekasreh'.



The (extent of) illiteracy in the “educated” and “specialist” Farsi-speakers on LinkedIn with regard to their mother tongue is shocking and painful. #hekasreh is the most common error in their writing. Where is the problem; schools and universities? Maybe. But these (people) who write so incorrectly, it is obvious that (they) don't read, even in their (own) area of specialty; let alone (in) literature.

Figure 12 - Tweet#3 (SMuser28)

In Figure 12 we see that SMuser28, too, draws on one-nation-one-language ideologies through explicit reference to Farsi as *mother tongue* associating the language with a sense of national belonging. Note that through this invocation s/he homogenizes all Iranians on Twitter as Farsi-speakers whose mother tongue is Farsi, erasing the multi-ethnic diversity of Iranians (see Irvine

& Gal 2000). S/he also later mentions literature, as a resource of national pride, which *Farsi-speakers*, especially the “educated” and “specialist” ones, should know and read. The invocation of standard language ideologies in creating the iconic image is made even more explicit through his/her prescriptivist language (*illiteracy, errors, incorrectly*) and mentioning of *schools and universities*, institutions which are the most influential in circulating and reproducing standardized norms, or to use Althusser’s (2006) terms *the ideological state apparatus*. However, s/he adds detail to the iconic image of a ‘good Iranian’, seen in the previous tweets, by making it more specific at a smaller scale rather than a broad and inclusive national one: This is done through the explicit word choice (*the “educated” and “specialist” Farsi-speakers*) as well as situating the image in a particular online time-space frame that is associated with education and professionalism (i.e. *LinkedIn*). SMuser28, thus, adds fractal detail to the image and constructs the image of a ‘good educated/professional Iranian’ (see Karimzad, 2020). S/he then evaluates *Farsi-speakers* deviating from this image by not following standard orthography as illegitimate, *illiterate*, and even uneducated and inexperienced Iranians (*But these (people) who write so incorrectly, it is obvious that (they) don’t read, even in their (own) area of specialty; let alone (in) literature*); note also the quotation marks around *educated* and *specialist* giving these words a sarcastic tone. In sum, through complex chronotopic-scalar orientations (i.e. large-scale offline chronotopes of tradition brought to dialogue with smaller-scale offline and online time-space frames of schools/universities and *LinkedIn*), SMuser28 frames the orthographic *errors* of a specific group of people (i.e. the so-called “educated” and “specialist”) on a specific online platform (i.e. *LinkedIn*) as a *problem*, and a *shocking* and *painful* one nonetheless, illegitimizing the new-‘hekasreh’-followers’ practices and identities.

The tweets analyzed in this section illustrated the polycentricity of the users’ orientations

and how they interact with their practices. While simultaneously orienting to different centers, the SM users showed a general tendency to invoke larger-scale hegemonic offline chronotopes of tradition applying them directly to their appraisal of normalcy in online platforms. Note that in the case of SMuser28, the smaller-scale time-spaces that s/he invokes, i.e. schools and universities and LinkedIn, are themselves nested within and fractally connected to larger-scale chronotopes of normalcy that feed from Standard language ideologies. Moreover, Tweet 3, specifically, showed a clear overlap of online and offline chronotopes by bringing them in dialogue with one another within the tweet. This online-offline overlap, then, reveals that no differentiation is made by these tweeters between online and offline contexts when evaluating normal sociolinguistic behavior, situating these practices in the online-offline nexus. Finally, we observed, more explicitly than in Chapter 5 and 6, how normativities of text get indexically linked to the normativities of contexts and the identities therein through tracing the construction of the idealized image of a ‘good’ Iranian.

7.3.2.2. New ‘hekasreh’ followers and contesting the idealized image

While the previous section focused on data from SM users who would police ‘hekasreh’, here I present examples to illustrate how the new-‘hekasreh’-followers contest the ideal ‘good’ Iranian image. In contesting the idealized image, these SM users construct an iconic image of the other group through their orientations towards more modern and transnational centers -- what I refer to as *chronotopes of modernity* (cf. Dick, 2010; Koven, 2013a)—and justify their positioning by portraying this image of the ‘hekasreh’ police and negatively evaluating them. Figure 13 shows one such tweet. The **#هکسرده** refers here to the standard rule itself and following it.



Figure 13 - Tweet#4 (SMuser29)

You've made us miserable with #hekasreh
Dear educated, cultured, whatever friend (!)
This is not a scientific book (for you) to look for spelling errors (in)
It's virtual space here
Here (people) write from their heart
Anyone types any way they like
And it doesn't have to do with the literacy level
(let's) learn to mind our own business

Correct the (spelling) errors of this too (!) ((smirking face emoji))

Right from the beginning, SMuser29 creates distance from the users policing 'hekasreh' through directly addressing them and using deictic contrast (*You've made us miserable with #hekasreh*). S/he then denaturalizes (Bucholtz & Hall 2005) their so-called *educated* and *cultured* identities by sarcastically addressing them (*Dear educated, cultured, whatever friend (!)*) implying that s/he does not consider their implicit authoritative claim about being 'good educated Iranians' themselves (and not others) as legitimate. Following this act of differentiation comes his/her situating his/her own, and other new-'hekasreh'-followers', online practices within a specific time-space frame: *This is not a scientific book (for you) to look for spelling errors (in). It's virtual space here. Here (people) write from their heart. Anyone types anyway they like*. Using the spatial deictic *here* twice along with the deictic *This*, the SM user highlights the spatiality of the specific sphere where these new practices occur (i.e. online space). S/he also contrasts this aspect of online communication with an emblematic example of written text in offline spaces

(*This is not a scientific book*). In addition, by mentioning the word *type*, rather than “write”, s/he invokes the behaviors and activities specific to *virtual space*. Together through mentioning the specific spaces and the particular entities and activities associated with them, s/he expresses that his/her understanding of normal linguistic/orthographic practices is anchored in certain time-space frames of online and offline nature.

Furthermore, in his/her statement *it doesn't have to do with the literacy level* s/he addresses the most common criticism directed at followers of new ‘hekasreh’: them being illiterate, and thus ignorant of the ‘rich’ Iranian culture and literature. S/he makes this statement right after explicitly differentiating between the chronotopic organization of online and offline contexts and hence illegitimizes the traditional view of literacy, as was brought up in Tweets 1 through 3, and instead implicitly legitimizes a ‘new’ literacy, or better say literacies, i.e. the online ones. S/he then takes an authoritative position through using authoritative language (*(let's) learn to mind our own business*) and ends her tweet with an imperative which combined with the smirking face emoji seems to be half-jokingly daring the ‘hekasreh’ police audience to correct the instances of non-standard orthography in his/her tweet.

Through complex chronotopic work in the tweet, an image is created of the ‘hekasreh’ police the portrayal of which helps SMuser29 in discrediting them, and by extension their claim of being ‘better’ Iranians. Through this iconic image, those who would police ‘hekasreh’ are portrayed as tech-naïve users who are constantly preoccupied with formalism and standardization and actively looking to correct other tweeters’ deviations from standard (*This is not a scientific book (for you) to look for spelling errors (in) and Correct the (spelling) errors of this too (!)*). This image of a tech-naïve pedant who is (only) interested in the minor details of formalism is one that is shown by SMuser29 as ‘out of place’ and ‘not normal’ on an online

platform (*It's virtual space here, Here (people) write from their heart ...*).

We observe that SMuser29's orienting towards more transnational and global centers of 'modernity', and their situating in contrast to those of tradition, allow him/her to draw a clear contrast between online vs. offline chronotopes of normalcy. Unlike Tweets 1 through 3, here there seems to be no online-offline overlap. This is also seen in the SM user's pointing to the out-of-placeness of the image created of the 'hekasreh' police. This online-offline differentiation pattern was observed in numerous examples. See for instance how Figure 14 shows another tweet that creates a chronotopic contrast by separating offline and online contexts. Note the similarity between the tone and the language in this tweet and Tweet 4.

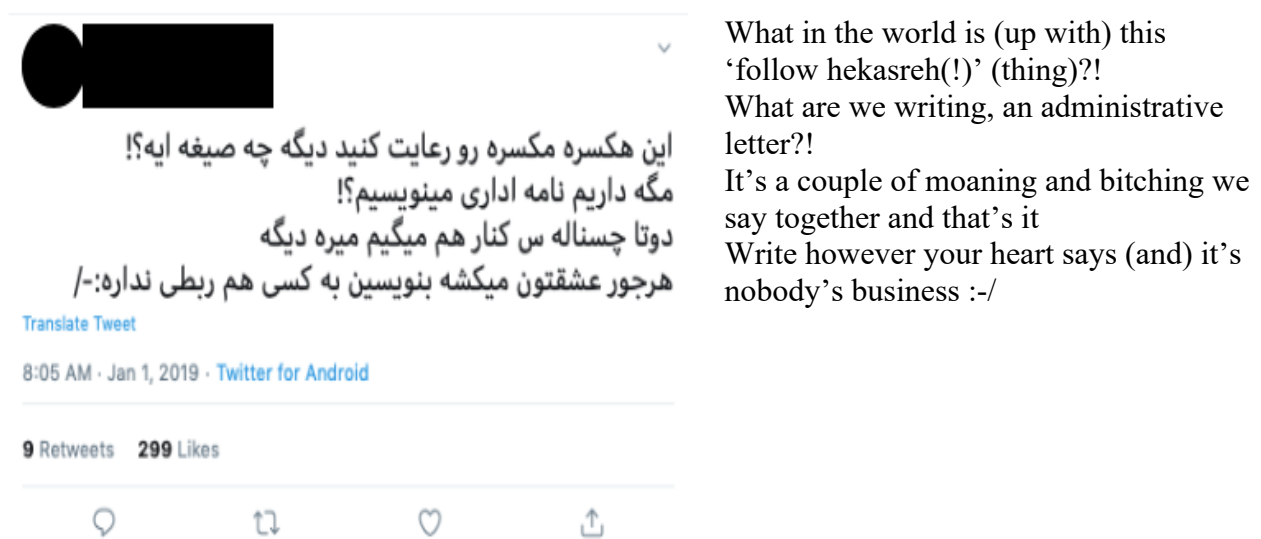


Figure 14 - Tweet#5 (SMuser30)

In this example we see, again, how this user creates distance at the beginning through voicing the 'hekasreh' police and questioning their message of 'following hekasreh'. S/he too mentions an emblematic example of a written offline text (*writing an administrative letter*) contrasting it with what is considered the usual type of Twitter communication. Finally, similar to SMuser29, s/he invites other SM users to write as their *heart says* and points out that this is *nobody's business*.

Note how making the contrast by mentioning these emblematic examples of offline formal text (i.e. *scientific book, administrative letter*) and the online casual interactions reveals that the SM users are, in fact, aware of the normativities of both contexts. The difference between them and the people who police ‘hekasreh’ is in their differently-scaled chronotopic orientations. That is, in discussing their understandings of online sociolinguistic normativity, they orient to less locally hegemonic chronotopes of modernity that allow for more heterogeneity in practices.

It is also important to note that in the examples presented in this section, as well, polycentricity is observed. That is, despite the clear online-offline divide in the SM users’ metapragmatic commentary and their strong orientations away from traditional centers, a close examination of their actual practices reveals that they inconsistently violate standard ‘hekasreh’ and at the same time follow some other standard linguistic norms (e.g. in Tweet 4 writing ‘ها’ pronounced as /ha/ rather than the shortened version of plural marker ‘ل’ pronounced as /a/ in غلطها meaning *errors*) pointing again to the importance of attending to online-offline nexus even if it is not explicitly notable.

I have so far demonstrated the chronotopic organization of online/offline orthographic normativity and how the SM users’ understandings of these guide their evaluations of certain practices and identities. In the remainder of this section, I will direct my focus to the argumentative nature of the chronotopic work done by the SM users in their negotiations of normalcy. To this end, I delve deeper into the dialogic dynamics of the arguments by analyzing the comments posted on Tweet 4 showing how the idealized image of a ‘good’ Iranian is once again invoked disregarding SMuser29’s argument.



Figure 15 - Comments on Tweet#4 (SMuser31 & 32)

SMuser31: ((Commenter1 has listed all of Tweeter4's spelling 'errors' in response to Tweeter4's joking invitation/dare at the end of his/her tweet))
(Let's) return to Farsi Dari

SMuser32: If, a thousand years ago, Roodaki and Manochehri ((two of Iran's famous historical poets)) had also said our poems are written from the heart, we write however we like, nothing would have remained from their poetry today. This language is the world's greatest treasury of lyrical literature, it's a pity (for it) to get destroyed.

Starting with the second comment, we see that SMuser32 implicitly illegitimizes SMuser29's (Tweet 4) argument regarding the online-offline differentiation by invoking the image of two other literary figures (*Roodaki and Manochehri*) living in a distant past (*a thousand years ago*) in Iran, referring explicitly to a 'traditional' offline spatiotemporal configuration. S/he further draws a direct comparison between the SM users, as mentioned in Tweet 4 (*Here (people) write from their heart. Anyone types anyway they like*), and these historical literary figures making the counterargument that if these poets *had also said our poems are written from the heart, we write however we like, nothing would have remained from their poetry today*. In doing so, SMuser32 constructs a hypothetical scenario happening in an imagined 'now' (*today*) where the new non-standard online orthographic practices, that SMuser29 is justifying as normal in *virtual space*, would have *destroyed Farsi, the world's greatest treasury of lyrical literature*. Through this

collapsing of time and space, SMuser32 reproduces norms that draw from dominant chronotopes of tradition and applies them directly to online contexts. Similar to Tweet 3, then, this comment clearly points to the online-offline overlap mentioned earlier. Note again how the ‘good’ Iranian image is constructed through similar invocations as we saw in Tweets 1 through 3.

A noticeable point in the interaction between SMuser29 and SMuser32 is that the latter has completely ignored the content of the argument made by SMuser29 about the online-offline differentiation. This pattern of ‘dismissiveness’ can also be seen in the first comment: while SMuser31 has corrected all of the spelling ‘errors’ in SMuser29’s tweet, there is no discussion about the argument made in the tweet. SMuser31 has only written the list of the corrected forms of spelling and a short sentence at the end inviting to return to Farsi Dari, the more ‘authentic’ and ‘pure’ Farsi⁷⁴ in SMuser31’s view. This total disregard of SMuser29’s somewhat lengthy argument demonstrates a power differential between the chronotopes of normalcy that different users are invoking and functioning within. This power differential stems from the difference in the ideological forces that feed into these chronotopes (Karimzad & Catedral, 2018b) as some users are drawing more from the hegemonic, larger-scale, and hence more accessible chronotopes of tradition while others are drawing from less (locally) dominant chronotopes of modernity. These examples give us a glimpse into how chronotopes are invoked and utilized to make arguments and/or defend or refute them. My data have provided more empirical evidence for Karimzad and Catedral’s (2018b) argument about the power differential between chronotopes that stems from the ideological power associated with different chronotopes. However, in line

⁷⁴ This perception is a rather extreme one since Farsi Dari is the variety of Farsi/Persian currently spoken in Afghanistan (for details, see Spooner 1994) and has gone through a process of linguistic subordination (Lippi-Green 1997) within Iran, i.e. it is often perceived as inferior to Iranian Farsi. This might call for more investigation on historical facts and might also require information about the specific social media user for a more accurate interpretation.

with my main goal in this dissertation on delving deeper into the complex nature of online interaction, I show in the next section that understanding the dynamics of power and chronotopes, especially with the advances of technology and the multisemioticity of online platforms, needs moving beyond the power ‘bestowed upon’ certain chronotopes by institutions, and paying attention to the processes through which chronotopic authorities are negotiated and claimed. This, I argue, is possible through a chronotopic-scalar approach since it has to do with the level of accessibility (scales) of certain chronotopes.

7.3.2.3. Scales, accessibility, and power ‘moves’

In this section, I demonstrate that besides invoking more powerful, thus more accessible, chronotopes in the ‘hekasreh’ debate, users utilize a variety of affordances made possible by technology and Internet culture to claim power in their argumentations. In the data presented, I explore how by creatively manipulating the accessibility of invoked chronotopes using different strategies, tweeters include some users and exclude others, exercising new forms of power. The first three pieces of data presented in Figures 16 through 19 help build my analysis for the final excerpt (Figure 20) which is the most indexically rich and perhaps the most exclusive. In Figure 16 below, *هکسره*# refers to standard ‘hekasreh’.



(I) mean fighting (the) White Walkers is easier than fighting for #hekasreh

Figure 16 - Tweet#6 (SMuser33)

First off, SMuser33 invokes chronotopic images of ‘war’ and ‘combatting’ by mentioning ‘fighting’ implicitly making the point that reminding other users to follow (standard) ‘hekasreh’ is like fighting a war. Interestingly, this was a pattern among the ‘hekasreh’ police to invoke chronotopes of ‘war’ and ‘fighting for Iran’ to exaggerate the severity of the ‘problem’ and the importance of fighting against and policing it, indirectly bringing in nationalist chronotopes as well (see section 7.3.2.1). But in Tweet 6, the analogy does not stop there. This SM user makes a direct comparison between fighting for ‘hekasreh’ and fighting وایت واکرا (the Persian transliterated form of the term White Walkers) claiming that the latter is easier. Through referencing the White Walkers, who are one of the critical anti-human characters of the popular HBO TV series Game of Thrones, SMuser33 invokes images associated with a specific time-space that operate within transnational and less locally relevant scales. In drawing on these *less accessible* chronotopic images, then, s/he restricts access to the different layers of meaning in his/her tweet and creates an in-group: only those users who are Game of Thrones fans or at least follow the show would get the reference and find the tweet funny. The user’s message has been taken up by other users as can be observed through the number of ‘like’s and ‘retweet’s.

Another example illustrating the processes of insider/outsider selection through manipulation of accessibility can be seen in Figure 17 (boldfaced indicates switch to English).



#hekasreh (debate) is **overrated**.

Comment: ((a GIF animation that shows Regina George, the iconic character from the popular 2000's movie Mean Girls, saying '**shut up!**'))

Figure 17 - Tweet#7 (SMuser34)

In this tweet, access-restriction to the SM user's argument about 'hekasreh' is done through switching to English. While all users who read this tweet would know that it is about the 'hekasreh' debate through the hashtag, only people with proficiency in English, and particularly proficiency about certain English expressions (i.e. *overrated*), would understand what the tweet means right away. Interestingly, another user has taken up the message and replied by posting a GIF of a scene from the Hollywood movie Mean Girls in the comments section disagreeing with the message conveyed in the tweet. This back and forth, again, reveals how exclusionary acts are performed based on the manipulation of the chronotopic images' accessibility.

Another access-restricting strategy can be seen in Figure 18. The SM user in this example has used an Internet meme to make his/her point about 'hekasreh'. This tweet is an adaptation of one of the widely-used Internet memes called the 'Evil Kermit meme'⁷⁵. This meme thread uses an

⁷⁵ See more details on <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/evil-kermit> (Last accessed 11/22/2021)

image of the Muppet character, Kermit the Frog, talking to his nemesis dressed in Star Wars attire who tempts him to carry out some kind of irrational/ unacceptable/abominable act. See an example of a typical Evil Kermit meme in Figure 19 below.



Vex (people) about (following standard) #hekasreh real bad(!) say “I’d even kill for it(!)” so that (they) say you’re (so) distinguished mashallah ((meaning here praise be to God)) #havaei ((two laughing crying face emojis))

Comment: ((exaggerated laughing crying face emoticon))

Figure 18 - Tweet#8 (SMuser35)



Figure 19 – Evil Kermit meme example

Following the general theme of the Evil Kermit meme, SMuser35 has portrayed the ‘hekasreh’ policing as an irrational, and even unacceptable, act one might be tempted to do. This is

especially made salient through the exaggeration of the act (say “I’d even kill for it”). S/he also denaturalizes the *distinguishedness* of the ‘hekasreh’ police through the joke and hence criticizes them. The hashtag at the end (#havaei) is a Farsi expression among Iranian Twitter users that they use when their tweet is directed at specific (groups of) people but they want to avoid the direct confrontation of replying or retweeting. Its use here shows that the ‘joke’ is a criticism directed at a certain group of people, i.e. the ‘hekasreh’ police. We see here again how through using less locally dominant transnational chronotopic images and bringing them in the discussion of a local issue, SMuser35 restricts accessibility to the entirety of his/her message so that only specific people (i.e. those who have seen this meme thread before and know how it is used and interpreted) would fully “get” the message and find it funny creating an in-group.

The last example, shown below in Figure 20, is perhaps the most restrictive in granting accessibility to its message among the tweets examined in this section as it brings together all the mentioned exclusionary strategies in one tweet. The #هکسره in Figure 20 refers to the violation of the standard rule.



I don't know who you are and where you are but I will find you and I will remind you (to correct) your #hekasreh writing (errors)

Comment1: ((three laughing crying face emojis))

Comment2 replying to Comment1: ((exaggerated laughing crying face emoticon))

Figure 20 - Tweet#9 (SMuser36)

At first glance, there might seem to be nothing interesting about this tweet. However, the laughing face emojis in the comments do reveal that there may be other layers of meaning in the tweet that meet the eyes. In order to “get” them, however, one has to have been exposed to a specific genre of Hollywood movies, and even beyond that a specific thread of Internet memes. This specificity of scope means that the prerequisite of fully ‘getting’ the message of this meme is having had developed certain chronotopic images that are highly semiotically-detailed. The tweet almost completely resembles a line from the thriller/action movie *Taken* released in 2009 starring Liam Neeson as Bryan Mills. The movie is about a former American government agent, Mills, whose daughter gets abducted by sex traffickers and shows his struggles to track down and rescue his daughter. This specific line whose almost identical Farsi translation is mentioned in this tweet, is from one of the critical scenes in the movie where Mills is talking to the abductor on the phone right after they had taken his daughter. The line goes:

I don’t know who you are. I don’t know what you want (...) If you let my daughter go now, that’ll be the end of it. I will not look for you, I will not pursue you. But if you don’t, **I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you.** (Hoarau, 2008)

The resemblance is notable when comparing the boldfaced sentences in the excerpt above with the translation of Tweet 9. What has been changed is that instead of ‘I will kill you’ at the end, we have *I will remind you (to correct) your #hekasreh writing (errors)*. This adoption and adaptation of the original message from the movie activates an archive of meanings at a transnational scale and bring those into dialogue with the ones at a local scale: the image of ‘hekasreh’ policing in Iran and in Farsi gets linked with the image of a rescue mission of a former American CIA agent, and in turn the violation of standard gets connected to a great crime like abduction that calls for action and retaliation. Through these cross-scalar and cross-

chronotopic links⁷⁶, SMuser36, similar to the other SM users in this section, restricts access to the entirety of his/her message and hence creates an in-group of people who would, besides knowing that the tweet is about the ‘hekasreh’ debate, get the reference.

Moreover, there is yet another nuance to how the tweet is operating which narrows down the potential in-group members even more. The tweet connects to a broader network of Internet memes which use a screenshot from the movie with Mills on the phone and superimpose an English caption manipulating the original line to tailor it to a theme of threatening people about mundane everyday affairs that might annoy one. See examples of this in Figure 21; on the left is only the image and the caption without any manipulation while on the right there is a typical example of the ‘Taken meme’⁷⁷ and closer to what we see in Tweet 9 here.



Figure 21 - Taken meme examples

In this sense, then, Tweet 9 is functioning as a specific meme without an accompanying image making its message even more implicit and restricting even further the in-group membership. The message of the tweet is received by the potential in-group members as we can see in the laughing comment on the tweet, the number of ‘likes’ and ‘retweet’s.

⁷⁶ Note how this process is very similar to the ‘Nancy Pelosi ripping the paper’ meme in Chapter 5, section 5.3.3.1.

⁷⁷ See more details on <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/i-will-find-you-and-i-will-kill-you> (Last accessed

11/22/2021)

The analysis of the data in this section demonstrated how SM users use creativity to perform exclusionary acts and form in-groups using a variety of technological affordances and communicative strategies (e.g. code-switching, references to pop culture, references to Internet culture, etc.) and based on the *limited local accessibility* of certain chronotopes. Therefore, adding to Karimzad and Catedral (2018b), I argue that while theorizing the argumentative nature and the power dynamics of chronotopes, one should pay heed not only to how the social actors invoke dominant and largely accessible chronotopes, i.e. the so-called more powerful chronotopes, but also to how different forms of authority are claimed through performing exclusionary acts using processes of access restriction and strategically calling in less accessible chronotopes. I suggest that a chronotopic-scalar approach provides us with the tools to capture the complexities of these ‘outscaling’ power moves (see also Blommaert, 2010).

7.4. Discussion

In this chapter, I have applied a chronotopic-scalar approach to the analysis of Iranian Twitter users’ understandings and evaluations of orthographic norms in online spaces by focusing on the specific case of ‘hekasreh’, a new Farsi non-Standard orthographic norm. I presented data from the two general groups who argue for or against the new ‘hekasreh’ norm and examined their (simultaneous) orientations to different centers in their justifications, arguing for the chronotopic organization of their understandings of sociolinguistic normativity. Particularly, I demonstrated that the polycentric orientations of all users fall somewhere on a chronotopically-organized spectrum that extends from a variety of differently-scaled offline chronotopes (e.g. large-scale chronotopes of tradition and smaller scales time-space frames like universities and schools) to differently-scaled online ones (e.g. large-scale chronotopes of modernity and smaller-scale time-space frames of LinkedIn or memes). As seen in the analysis, generally the orientations of those

who disalign with the new ‘hekasreh’ would fall on a range of the spectrum that involves more larger-scale hegemonic ‘traditional’ chronotopic images rooted in offline contexts. On the other hand, those of the new-‘hekasreh’-followers can be situated within a domain of the spectrum that encompasses differently-scaled ‘modern’ chronotopic images ingrained more in online contexts.

I showed through closer examination, however, that a deep and comprehensive understanding of the interactions around ‘hekasreh’ goes beyond attending to these general tendencies, and requires careful investigation of the intricate chronotopic work that is being carried out. I illustrated that this can be achieved through a chronotopic-scalar lens that allows us to explore how users draw upon fractal connections between differently-scaled chronotopes (e.g. Tweet 3) adding more detail to the images they invoke, or how they show simultaneous orientations towards differently-scaled ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ images within online or offline time-space frames (e.g. Tweet 6). I argued for a more dynamic view on chronotopic authority-claiming processes in interactions by looking at the complex ways SM users manipulate the accessibility to their messages using technological and communicative affordances offered by social media for performing ‘outscaling’ moves.

The chapter also shed more light on how, in social media communication, transnationality (in the sense of connectivities beyond the borders of nation states) is relevant to even seemingly ‘local’/‘national’ sociolinguistic phenomenon and seemingly ‘non-mobile’ people. We specifically observed this in section 7.3.2.3. when images operating at transnational scales were invoked and cross-scalar links were made to make an argument for or against “hekasreh”. While some scholars have talked about these types of mixings of semiotics in terms of cultural hybridity (e.g. Pennycook, 2006; see also Tetreault, 2015) and some others have highlighted the trans-local/-national nature of digital communication (Kytölä, 2016), this type of

analysis integrating both chronotopes and scales links the two approaches. That is, it shows how seemingly ‘non-mobile’ people invoke and adopt the various transnational ‘images’ accessible to them in their meaning-making and identification processes.

Finally, through looking at a debate and a sociolinguistic norm that is situated in the online-offline nexus, I highlighted the dialogic nature of online and offline spaces offering an account that takes into consideration the links across online and offline chronotopes. I specifically showed how users’ metapragmatic commentary and practices reveal simultaneous orientations to online and offline chronotopes and how in some cases (e.g. Tweets 1 through 3) the online and the offline largely overlap. This dynamic dialogue between online and offline spaces is in fact what leads to the constant updating of old normalcies and the emergence of new ones and has implications for the broader theories of sociolinguistics of online and offline communication drawing attention to their interaction.

I would like to end this chapter by a final note on the similarities and the nuanced differences between the idealized images of Iranianness that were constructed in Chapter 6 and this chapter. In both chapters, the image was constructed through invocations of higher-scale idealized chronotopes associated with Standardness. I have already pointed to one of the nuanced differences between the two images: that of their chronotopic organization. That is, while in Chapter 6 the constructed ideal image was situated within the time-space of diaspora and was adopted for evaluation specifically at the ‘transnational’ level, the one constructed in this chapter was situated within the time-space of Iran and, in contrast to the one in Chapter 6, was specifically adopted for evaluation at the ‘local’/‘national’ level. Looking at the scalar organization of the chronotopes invoked can help explain why this is the case. In Chapter 6, the dominant chronotopes of neoliberalism and English hegemony that were brought along with

Standard language ideologies were of relatively larger scale than the chronotopes of nationalism brought up here due to their relevance across more contexts. That is, although both chronotopes, i.e. neoliberalism in Chapter 6 and nationalism in Chapter 7, are dominant and larger-scale, the former is of wider scope of applicability than the latter. This is why we see that in Chapter 6 we have both migrants and non-migrants engaged in the collective construction of the idealized image of a ‘good’ (migrant-)Iranian while in this chapter the construction is done by mostly non-migrants⁷⁸.

Besides the difference in the scope, as well-as value, of the chronotopes, we can account for this discrepancy in the demographics of the SM users involved in the two chapters through using the notions of chronotopization and resolution. The relatively smaller scope of distribution in the case of our Chapter 7 means that many of the SM users, for instance 2nd-gen migrants, have not encountered these contexts with a high semiotic resolution. To elaborate, while they might be able to recognize Farsi script or some words in Farsi script, and might even in some cases be able to read and write Farsi script⁷⁹, they are unlikely to have high-resolution images of the script normativities itself as well as the ideologies associated with them. They, for instance, do not recognize the details of different varieties of the script, certain nuanced orthographic rules, and so on. Additionally, in the case of 1st-gen migrants, specifically the younger ones for whom online communication is an essential part of everyday life, they are likely to have less contact/encounters with the Farsi script on a regular basis compared to when they were back ‘home’ especially in offline contexts⁸⁰. This means that due to Farsi not being the dominant

⁷⁸ In section 7.2 I briefly discussed the ‘local’/‘national’ nature of the “hekasreh” phenomenon observed through my online and offline ethnography and the data.

⁷⁹ This is not a very common case as many heritage language speakers do not receive formal education in their mother tongue and thus are usually able to manage the spoken registers but not the written ones.

⁸⁰ In my ethnographic observations of 1st-gen migrants, they would make comments about how they “have forgotten to write ((with a pen)) in Farsi” and that most of their experience with written Farsi is through texting with their

language in their immediate chronotopic contexts, the once high-resolution perceptions of orthographic normativity might start to gradually ‘deteriorate’ (compare with the notion of ‘language attrition’ in SLA (Second Language Acquisition)). Moreover, they might also not be exposed to the contexts where new Farsi orthographic norms, like “hekasreh” are discussed and debated as the script itself is not immediately relevant to them. This limited access is what makes “hekasreh” a ‘local’/‘national’ phenomenon.

families and friends back home. Even in the case of online communication, many mentioned that they use Finglish rather than the Farsi script.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

8.1. Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the three case studies, linking them to one another and elaborating on how together they provide us with insights about different aspects of social media communication. I then lay out the implications and contributions of the dissertation to the theoretical and analytical approaches in online sociolinguistics and sociolinguistics of mobility. Finally, I point out the limitations of the project and conclude the dissertation with suggestions for future directions this research can take.

8.2. Discussion of Results

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated how Iranian social media users use the online space, with all of its technological and communicative affordances, to construct, negotiate, and evaluate identities specifically with regard to (migrant-)Iranianness. I have shown the complexity, heterogeneity, and multisemioticity of online identification processes performed by users illustrating how this identity work is guided by social actors' perceptions of online and offline sociolinguistic/semiotic normativities and how these normativities are chronotopic in that they are organized relative to specific time-space configurations. I used a chronotopic-scalar framework to discuss how depending on actors' chronotopization histories, i.e. what chronotopes at what scales of relevance the individuals had interacted with in their socialization processes, there is 'differential accessibility' (Karimzad, 2021) to these chronotopic normative images which has consequences for, especially online, interactions. I have, thus, highlighted the importance of attending to this unequal accessibility and its role in meaning-making processes in online spaces. That is, I underscored that in a space where there is the multiplicity of actors (Blommaert et al., 2009), the inherent trans-locality/-nationality (Kytölä, 2016), the

multisemioticity and multimodality (Leppänen & Kytölä, 2016), and the polycentricity/polynormativity (Blommaert, 2018; see also Androutsopoulos & Lexander, 2021) of communication, there is a need for an analytical-theoretical approach that can accurately trace the chronotopic identity work of the SM users. This framework should be able to account for why certain messages get accurately interpreted by some users, while misunderstood or not understood at all by others. More importantly, the framework should provide us with the necessary tools to examine how and why SM users employ different discursive strategies in their online interactions to create and circulate such messages. In the analysis chapters of this dissertation, I have shown the utility of a chronotopic-scalar approach in investigating online communication through examining a variety of data formats from three different social media platforms (i.e. Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter).

In the first two analysis chapters, Chapter 5 and 6, I focused on online performances and evaluations of (certain types of) (migrant-)Iranianness and how differently-scaled chronotopes of normalcy are drawn upon by the SM users in their (meta)linguistic/semiotic practices. I started off by focusing on explicitly multimodal/multisemiotic identity work in Chapter 5: the memetic identifications. I explored a certain meme genre, i.e. the ‘diaspora’ memes, where migrant Iranians navigate their transnationality and hybridity. I demonstrated the constructions of ‘generic’ migrant-Iranianness as well as certain types of migrant-Iranianness, i.e. 1st and 2nd gen migrant Iranianness, through SM users’ invocations of different chronotopes of normalcy associated with ‘here’, the diaspora, and ‘there’, Iran, and the identities situated within these. I specifically showed how norms of text at the phonological and lexical level became indexically linked with the chronotopically-situated personhood of the 1st gen parent, creating a high-resolution normative image of them that the 2nd gen SM users invoked to construct their own

unique migrant identity by positioning themselves relative to them in the memes. I argued that given the migrants' chronotopization histories and having constructed high-resolution normative images of how 'older' 1st generation migrant Iranians, like their parents, speak English, the migrants find their parents' 'accents' funny but endearing and an essential part of their upbringing experience.

In Chapter 6, I explored performances and more importantly evaluations of (migrant-)Iranianness based on a very similar Farsi-accented English in a different case study around a viral music video. I focused on reaction videos to this music video and discussed how similar phonological norms associated with Farsi-accented English speech were evaluated differently, compared to what was seen in Chapter 5, through orientations to larger-scale hegemonic chronotopes of normalcy and were indexically linked to 'anti-ideal' images of (migrant-)Iranianness. I elaborated on the reasons for such discrepancy by pointing out the issues of large-scale representation due to the virality situation and lack of high-resolution normative images of younger 1st generation migrants among the SM users. I specifically showed this through the difference in YT2's conflicting evaluations of the same accent in the context of his parents in his own comedy skits and the artists in the music video. In the former, I argued, his high-resolution images of 'older' 1st generation migrants like his parents and the exact 'normal' and 'natural' way they speak English (i.e. with a Farsi accent, structural 'errors', and frequent CS to Farsi) allowed him to use this in light-hearted jokes showing a sense of nostalgic appreciation (Koven & Marques, 2017) and affection towards them. His lack of high-resolution normative images of younger 1st generation migrant Iranians, however, led him to recourse to larger-scale idealized chronotopes of normalcy, feeding from standard language ideologies and neoliberal ideologies, in evaluating the artists' English and (migrant-)Iranian identities.

In both Chapters 5 and 6, I also examined the comments posted by other, migrant *and* non-migrant, SM users to explore the collective identity work done online. Investigating the uptake of the messages in the memes (Chapter 5) and the reaction video (Chapter 6) was especially insightful as it provided a window into how the notions of chronotopization (histories) and (chronotopic) resolution can be adopted to account for differential accessibility to the messages and polycentric alignment/disalignment patterns. Figure 2 in Chapter 5 (the Star Wars meme with ‘Sadaf’ as the key indexical), for instance, was not fully understood or accurately interpreted by all SM users. I demonstrated how understanding the meme, and in turn its relatability, depended on whether the viewers’ chronotopic repertoires were equipped with certain high-resolution detailed normative images of life ‘here’ in diaspora, i.e. having had to seek comfort and ‘home’ in Sadaf products. The analysis of uptake in Chapter 6 in the comments posted on YT2’s reaction video, specifically those posted by non-migrant users, showed alignment patterns that were polycentric. I discussed, for instance, how ‘local’ chronotopes, like EFL contexts in Iran, would be invoked to arrive at the same negative evaluation of the artists that was done by YT2. I elaborated on how a chronotopic-scalar approach allowed for capturing the nuances in these alignment patterns focusing on the SM users’ chronotopization trajectories and low-resolution images of ‘migration’.

While Chapters 5 and 6 were focused on orientations to smaller-scale higher-resolution chronotopes of normalcy (Chapter 5) and larger-scale hegemonic chronotopes (Chapter 6) in performing and evaluating (migrant-)Iranianness, in Chapter 7 I focused on a *debate*, or what I called a construction *and* contestation situation, where I demonstrated SM users’ invocations of a variety of differently-scaled chronotopes in arguing for or against a specific online non-standard Farsi orthographic norm. I showed that in the debate the two main groups, who generally aligned

or disaligned with the norm, linked orthographic normativity to specific time-spaces rooted in online and offline contexts and created iconic images of the group they were arguing with. Using the notions of *limited accessibility* of certain chronotopes and ‘outscaling’, I elaborated on the argumentative nature of SM users’ online identity work and discussed how a chronotopic-scalar approach could accurately capture the nuances of authority-claiming processes. I thus added to the scholarship on chronotopes and power highlighting the dynamicity of online communication (cf. Karimzad & Catedral, 2018b). Finally, through focusing on an orthographic practice that is so explicitly situated within the online-offline nexus, I drew attention to the dialogicity of online and offline spaces and underscored the usefulness of a chronotopic-scalar framework in its capacity in tracing the links between differently-scaled online and offline time-spaces and how they guide SM users’ interactions in the era of social media.

To further connect Chapter 7 to the other chapters, a few brief explanations are in order here. One of the main focuses in this chapter was the ‘differential accessibility’ of certain images and how it was used to create in-groups/out-groups in the debates. Note that I discussed this type of ‘differential accessibility’ in terms of difference in resolutions and whether SM users would understand a meme or misinterpret it in Chapter 5 with the ‘diaspora’ memes as well. In that chapter, however, manipulation was not used in the context of arguing about and debating an issue but more in the context of highlighting shared experiences of migrants (see Figure 2 and its analysis for example). In Chapter 7, on the other hand, we had a context of argumentation and justification which made these ‘outscaling’ strategies specifically function as power moves, rather than solidarity moves highlighting similarities of experiences. Finally, while Chapter 6 and 7 were both concerned with tracing the constructions of an idealized image of Iranianness, the latter was additionally focused on both constructions *and* contestations of this idealized image by

different SM users. In section 7.4 I further discussed the different chronotopic organization of these idealized images as one was situated in the time-space of ‘diaspora’ (Chapter 6, hence the term ‘(migrant-)Iranianness’ used throughout the chapter) while the other was anchored within Iran (Chapter 7). I discussed how while both images were constructed through invocations of higher-scale idealized chronotopes of normalcy, their situatedness in diaspora vis-à-vis Iran made certain dominant chronotopes more relevant than others. That is, in Chapter 6 and in constructing the image of a ‘good’ (migrant-)Iranian, SM users invoked *relatively* larger-scale chronotopes of neoliberalism and English hegemony than the, still dominant, chronotopes of tradition invoked in Chapter 7. I used this difference in scope and value of the invoked chronotopes as well as the difference in different resolutions of the script, and the ideologies associated with it, depending on SM users’ chronotopization histories to justify the demographics (i.e. migrant and/or non-migrant) of the SM users engaged in the constructions of the two ideal images.

In all of these convergences and divergences of the three case studies focused on in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 I demonstrated the utility and applicability of a chronotopic-scalar framework for exploring online communication. In the following, I will elaborate on the implications and contributions of the dissertation.

8.3. Implications and Contributions

Through the findings discussed in the previous section, the dissertation adds to the scholarship on online sociolinguistics and sociolinguistics of mobility and transnationality. The study also has empirical contributions to the body of work in Iranian sociolinguistics. The contributions of the dissertation are on theoretical, methodological, and empirical levels.

With regard to online sociolinguistics, the study takes a chronotopic-scalar approach

towards theorizing online communication. I argue that the multisemiotic, polycentric, and complex nature of online identity work, which is very much so situated in the online-offline nexus (Blommaert, 2018), can be carefully analyzed in detail through integrating the analytical-theoretical notions of chronotopes and scales (Karimzad, 2021). The notions of ‘chronotopization’ and ‘resolution’ specifically prove to be useful for an accurate analysis of the creative and agentive identification practices that take advantage of resmiotization processes (Iedema, 2003; Leppänen et al. 2014). They also provided a window into the polycentricity and polynormativity (Blommaert, 2018; see also Androutsopoulos & Lexander, 2021) of online communication at a variety of semiotic levels demonstrating how participants draw on their chronotopic, rather than merely linguistic, repertoires in their constructions and evaluations of (trans-)national identities. Finally, the chronotopic-scalar approach allowed for the argumentative nature of identity work to be understood. The dynamic framing of authority-claiming practices through capitalizing on the unequal accessibility of certain normative images, that I demonstrated in Chapter 7 specifically, adds to the scholarship on chronotopes and power (cf. Karimzad & Catedral, 2018b).

Regarding the study’s contribution to the field of sociolinguistics of mobility and transnationality, the dissertation demonstrated how in the era of the Internet, understandings of transnationality should be broadened to include not only the contexts where people are physically mobile, i.e. migration, but also the seemingly ‘local’ contexts like Iran. This need for a broader understanding of transnationality that goes beyond migration contexts has been recently discussed by some scholars (see for example Canagarajah, 2017). By demonstrating how migrants and non-migrants in my study have ‘dialogues’ with each other on social media (see for instance the analysis of the ‘Summers in Iran’ meme in Figure 4, Chapter 5) and how they collectively construct, circulate, and reproduce certain ideologies and normative images of

(migrant-)Iranianness (see the comments on YT2's reaction video in section 6.3.3.2, Chapter 6), I demonstrated the relevance of transnationality to both migrants and non-migrants (cf. Dick, 2010). Even in Chapter 7 where a very 'local' issue was being discussed by mostly Iranians within Iran, I demonstrated how transnationality was still relevant as the SM users had access to images operating at transnational scales and would bring them in for the discussions of the local issue. I thus argued, along similar lines as Kytölä (2016), that by virtue of participating on social media, social actors are trans-local/-national. The (digital) polycentricity that I discuss in this dissertation by looking at both 'mobile' and 'non-mobile' users, therefore, adds more nuance and complexity to the general polycentricity that has been discussed in studies of transnationality, i.e. simultaneous orientations to both 'home' and 'host' countries (see for example Catedral, 2018).

Empirically, the dissertation provides an insightful understanding of the sociolinguistics of an understudied population through its focus on Iranians both inside and outside of Iran. Since most of the studies investigating Iranians' sociolinguistic practices have been concerned with immigrant communities and offline spaces (e.g. Karimzad, 2016a), and the studies that do focus on online communication have been mostly on the topics of sociopolitical activism (e.g. Rahimi, 2011; Wojcieszak & Smith 2014), there is need for more sociocultural/sociolinguistic studies on online activities of Iranians both within Iran and abroad. This is particularly insightful due to the sociolinguistic/semiotic hybridity and heterogeneity of online communication and the lack of a solid body of research addressing these issues in Iranian social media (for an exception see Faris & Rahimi, 2015). Through offering a detailed account of how Iranians, migrant and non-migrant, perform and evaluate (trans-)national identities online on a variety of social media platforms and through various forms of data, the dissertation takes a step in that direction.

8.4. Limitations

In this section, I will outline some of the limitations of this project. First, like many other studies in online research and online ethnography there were methodological challenges. That is, as with most online studies, the researcher is reliant, to an extent, on the information made available by the SM users. This information, however, might not always be truthful or accurate. SM users might choose to give aliases and different locations for themselves. In the case of this project, there was also the complications with filtering in Iran where even the locations that one might obtain from analytics firms would most likely be inaccurate due to specific censorship-bypassing processes. Although I did show that with a solid online and offline ethnography some of these challenges might be undermined and dealt with, there is no doubt that the availability and accessibility of more, and highly accurate, ethnographic information (e.g. age, time of arrival in the ‘host’ country, detailed location, etc.) of the SM users helps in creating a higher-resolution picture of the analysis.

Second, while my intention in the dissertation has been to investigate the online sociolinguistic practices among Iranians, the study is not comprehensive in that it only discusses certain online identification practices around certain topics related to (migrant-)Iranianness. For instance, in studying the memes, only ‘diaspora’ memes were focused on and the ‘inside-Iran’ memes were only briefly mentioned. Closely examining how non-migrants adopt/adapt memes to navigate their daily interactions and experiences would be insightful as it again provides an account of how any individual by the virtue of participating in social media is ‘trans-local/-national’. We observed some examples of this in the ‘hekasreh’ debate (e.g. Tweets 6 through 9), but a more thorough investigation of online dynamics among Iranians within Iran is still required. The same goes for the specific online interactions among 1st and 2nd generation

migrants.

Finally, the focus of the dissertation was on performances of (migrant-)Iranianness in a more broad and general sense. That is, for example migrants were operationally defined as “Iranians who live and/or were born outside of Iran and do not have immediate plans of coming back to live in Iran” without paying attention to the specific countries they live in. On the other hand, a zoomed-out approach to Iranianness did not take into account ethnolinguistic identities of the ethnic minorities, for instance. For the purposes of this dissertation, which was in fact to study (migrant-)Iranians’ online practices at a large scale and within a broad scope, this approach was justified. This was observed in the prevalence of English and Farsi languages in data that would connect more (migrant-)Iranians together. However, there were some, not very frequent, instances across the data that languages other than English (e.g. German and French) and Farsi (e.g. Azeri) were used in the comments. These were excluded from the data as I was not equipped with the resources to analyze them. Inevitably, with the exclusion of these instances, some insight on the more nuanced identification practices were lost as well.

8.5. Future Research

To address some of the points mentioned in the previous section, I lay out some possible future directions this research can take.

Besides possible future projects that can target different aspects of migrant and non-migrant Iranians’ SM practices, like the ‘inside-Iran’ memes mentioned above, to provide a more comprehensive account of the dynamics of online communication among Iranians, more data can also be collected with regard to the same topic of performing and evaluating of (migrant-)Iranianness but in smaller scopes and with higher ethnographic details. That is, in line with the last limitation mentioned above, including data that are in other languages would be very helpful

in that they would add more diverse and complex language-ideological discourses to the mix. Given that across my datasets languages other than Farsi and English were rarely used, other possible sources for data collection should be identified. This would likely mean that more localized platforms (e.g. a Facebook page for migrant Iranians based in Germany, etc.) should be included as the main sources of the data. Moreover, this project would have to be a collaborative one with another researcher that has access to the linguistic/semiotic resources needed for the analysis.

Another interesting direction the research can take is to examine more explicit interactions of the bottom-up grassroots online processes, that we saw in this work, with the top-down institutional discourses regarding sociolinguistic normativities. For example, in my ethnography I have observed that because of the seeping back of the “hekasreh” into people’s offline practices, there have been attempts at having sessions on national TV with ‘experts’ to ‘re-teach’ the standard rule. There have also been discussions about the possibility, or necessity, of including a topic on the ‘hekasreh’ crisis’ to instructional books in schools. This type of dialogue between online and offline normativity would be insightful for further research moving forward to shed more light on how the online and offline spaces interact with one another and what the consequence of this interaction are.

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APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Underline	emphatic stress
(. . .)	intervening material has been omitted
(.)	brief pause
(hahaha)	laughter
(())	transcriber comment
()	English translation within brackets is added by the author for clarification
:	lengthening of preceding sound
↑	rising intonation
↓	falling intonation
bold	switch to English

APPENDIX B

MEME ADAPTATIONS

1. Jerry Crying Meme (from Rick and Morty)



2. White people dancing

Mash-up with MC hammer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ycnME7m9eE>

Mash-up with Da dip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLo1tiujM-8>

3. Nancy Pelosi Ripping Paper Meme



4. Putting on Clown Makeup Meme

