Popularity of Turkish Media and its Effect on Turkish Language Learning of Azerbaijani Minority in Iran
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ABSTRACT
The role of the media, in general, in the process of language learning is undeniable. Turkish media, in particular, is extremely popular among 25-30 million Azerbaijani people who live in Iran. Various channels provided by Turkish media are enjoyed by a large number of people ranging from child to adult. Turkey Turkish and Azerbaijani Turkish are the closest languages among Altaic languages. Hence, they are lexically and grammatically, have many things in common. It is to the extent that speakers of these languages are able to communicate with each other. Nearly all Azerbaijani Turkish speakers who live in Iran watch Turkish channels through Turksat. In order to find out the effect of Turkish media on Turkish language learning of Azerbaijani minority and to investigate the most popular programs that are watched in Iran, a questionnaire was designed and administered to a large group of Azerbaijani people who live in different regions of Iran, e.g. Tabriz, Ardabil, Urmieh, Zanjan, and Tehran. According to the results, one typical Azerbaijani family watches Turkish TV channels at least four to five hours a day. Nearly seventy eight percent of Azerbaijani people prefer to watch more Turkish TV channels than the Persian TV channels. As a result of exposure to the Turkish language, nearly 88 percent of Azerbaijani family groups who watch Turkish channels have little difficulty understanding Turkey Turkish. In addition, the most popular TV programs of the Azerbaijani minority are discussed in detail.

Keywords: Turkish Media and Azerbaijani minority

1. Introduction

Media as the most powerful tool of communication gives an excessive exposure to the mass audience about what is right or wrong. The media focuses on the social issues in almost every era and it plays a constructive role in all the communities. Media has enormously provided the opportunities for people of this planet to know more about each other, and also to shape and reshape each other’s thoughts and actions. Thanks to the media, people have contact with different ideas, values, and ways of life. Global electronic media should be regarded as one of the engines that control cultural globalization. In fact, the role of electronic media in the globalizing world is well established. As Kumaravadivelu (2003) points, globalization is shrinking space, shrinking time, and disappearing borders. It is
shrinking space by which people’s lives, their jobs, incomes, and health are affected by events on the other side of the globe, often by events that they know nothing about. It is shrinking time by which markets and technologies now are being changed with unprecedented speed, with action at a distance immediately affecting people’s lives far away. It is disappearing borders to the extent that national borders are breaking down, not only for trade, capital, and information but also for ideas, norms, cultures, and values. By breaking down the borders, globalization paves the way for people to get informed of those sharing the same ethnicity.

Flows of information through media are what Appadurai (1990) conceptualizes as mediascape. Mediascape is one of the significant outcomes of the globalization. Through flows of information mainly by newspapers, magazines, satellite television channels, and websites, people in different parts of the world could stay closely informed about the events happening in far edge of the globe. The media of mass communication, then, play a fundamental part in our lives, occurring in a wide variety of settings. According to Turow (2009), mass media refers to the technological vehicles through which mass communication takes place. It encourages large number of people living in different parts of the world to share the same materials. In addition, mass media create people’s common lived experiences, a sense of the common culture and the varieties of subcultures acceptable to it. Mass media materials speak to the most personal parts of our lives. They also connect us to the world beyond our private circumstances. As a result, mass media industries are a major force in society.

Compared to other ways of extracting information through media, today television has become an integral part in almost all the houses and it is believed to be the most effective means of communication in our world today. TV is known to be the most effective option to get informed and the best choice to entertain. TV is one of the most familiar and popular media technologies. According to Fallahkhair et al. (2004), over 98% of households in the EU and North America have access to television and for many the TV set is the central interest of the household. People of all educational levels, ages and social classes are already familiar with television and use it comfortably. Many television shows reflects significant cultural events providing a shared reference for people sharing or aspiring to share a culture. Flows of information through satellite television channels are seen to be the main and widespread mean of getting information in the globe. It is noteworthy that the role of television is extremely significant in our lives these days. It is very difficult to think about a house without television. Through television we have easy access to different types of programs. Programs on cartoon, sports, news and many more can be viewed with the help of television. It has become so helpful that it keeps us updated about the worldwide news, sports, weather conditions etc. By sitting at home we can have a quick look through all the updates. It provides knowledge about many incidents happening across the world. Hence, television can be regarded as one of the essential means of communication.

Television is a type of media technology that has enormous promise for learning (Atwere & Bates, 2003; Pemberton, 2002) and for supporting language learning, particularly for independent adult (Fallahkhair et al., 2004). Many new media technologies have seemed to have potential for assisting in language learning. Hence, the role of the media in language learning seems to be unquestionable. It is due to the fact that electronic media, TV in particular, provides opportunities for the people in different parts of the world to get familiar
with the unknown languages and cultures. Digital television, available via cable and satellite, adds a new dimension to learning from the TV by multiplying available channels (Meinhof, 1998; Moores, 1996). Therefore, TV is already a powerful learning environment for language learners.

Thanks to globalized and globalizing world, TV seems to perform the function of comprehensible input for people interested to learn second or foreign languages. As Pemberton and Fallahkhair (2005) state, conventional TV is a powerful learning tool for language learners. They believe that there is abundant evidence of individuals learning other languages from exposure to televised soap operas, films and sports reporting. Media technologies allow a wide variety of activities and experiences that can support language learning (Milton, 2002; Bickel & Truscello, 1996). Television provides a rich multimedia experience, where learners can immerse themselves in authentic materials from the target language and culture. These materials, unlike text books, tend to be worth watching in its own right, with up-to-date ever-changing content displaying a range of speakers and contexts. As a result of exposure to the languages through TV channels, listening ability of the learners could be improved. Sherington (1973), however, believes that television presents obvious opportunities for developing listening and comprehension skills, it may not be pertinent for developing speaking and writing skills.

Eraut (2000, as cited in Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002) makes a distinction between formal and informal learning. According to him, formal learning is provided by an educational institution, structured in terms of learning objectives, time and support and leading to certification. Informal learning, however, takes place in day-to-day life activities, related to work, family or leisure and may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional or incidental and random. Marsick and Watkins (1990) in similar believe that formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but it is not typically class-room based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. In regard to media, language learning tends to be based more on informal learning. People watching conventional TV channels cannot keep control of their language learning. Variety of authentic programs is watched incidentally and language learning process is likely to happen both intentionally and unintentionally. Therefore, language learning through media is type of informal learning.

As far as Azerbaijani minority is concerned, Turkish media could accommodate Azerbaijani people living in Iran with channels in Turkey Turkish. Turkey Turkish is seen as a second language for the speakers of Azerbaijani Turkish. Continuous exposure to Turkish media seems to have a significant role in creating ample opportunities for Azerbaijani people to improve their listening ability. Being able to understand what is said in Turkish channels could carry out a crucial function in motivating the Azerbaijani people to watch Turkish channels and enjoy them. Owning to the exposure to Turkish channels, Azerbaijani people are in the position in which they can both enjoy watching the diverse and numerous programs provided by Turkish media and learn Turkey Turkish as their second language.

Turow (2009) introduces four reasons for which people use media: enjoyment, companionship, surveillance, and interpretation;
• **Enjoyment.** It usually refers to a basic human urge. Media with all its facilities can provide wide range of opportunities to enjoy. Watching a television program, for example, can bring this kind of satisfaction to many people. News stories, daytime soap operas, sports, and primetime dramas can lead to everyday talk with friends, relatives, work colleagues, and even strangers.

• **Companionship.** It points to a condition in which mass media bring pleasure to the lonely and the alone. A chronically ill hospital patient or a home-bound citizen may find companionship by viewing their favorite sports teams on TV, or listening to the music of days gone by on the radio. Sometimes, media can even help people who feel troubled and in need of friends. The term parasocial interaction describes the psychological connections that some media users establish with celebrities they learn about through the mass media. People who are involved in a parasocial interaction typically enjoy a feeling of forming a special relationship with those celebrities.

• **Surveillance.** It points to the time when media is used to learn about what is happening in the world around us. We do this every day, often without realizing it. Looking for a job or trying to find out the weather could be considered as examples of surveillance.

• **Interpretation.** It refers to the time when people want to find out why things are happening—who or what is the cause—and what to do about them. When people try to find reasons, they are looking for interpretation.

Looking through the four ways of using media, it seems that the first two, enjoyment and companionship are considered to be the most significant reasons for using media in general and TV in particular.

2. **Azerbaijani Ethnic Groups**

Azerbaijani minority living in Iran are mainly concentrated in northwest of Iran, which is commonly named ‘Southern Azerbaijan’. The important provinces of southern Azerbaijan include Western, Eastern Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan, and Hamadan. The main language spoken by the people is Azerbaijani Turkish which is considered as a variety of Turkish language and as a member of Altaic languages. Azerbaijani Turkish is common for the northern and southern part of Azerbaijani ethnic groups. Southern Azerbaijan has borders with three countries including The Republic of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Armenia. Under the terms of the treaty, the oil-rich region that they inhabit was carved and parcelled out to the Soviet and Iran. Azerbaijani people are now living in these countries and, in smaller numbers, in Georgia. The largest groups of Azerbaijani people live in Iran, but Iran’s official census figures have not indicated the exact number of the Azerbaijani minority who inhabit in Iran. However, it is estimated that there are about 25 to 30 million Azerbaijani people in Iran. They are nearly a third/ a half of the country’s population.

3. **Turkish Channels**

Turksat, the only satellite operator company in Turkey, provides all types of satellite communications. It is one of the world’s leading operators in the satellite communication
business. Through innovative projects to meet the communication demands of the communities in the East hemisphere Turksat provides services not only for Turkey, but also for the people all over the world. It provides large number of channels mainly in Turkish language. Azerbaijani Turkish and Turkey Turkish belong to Altaic group of languages and lexically and grammatically are the closest languages among Altaic language family. Such closeness could be due to the fact that Turkey and Azerbaijani people are adjacent and share the same ethnicity.

As far as Azerbaijani minority is concerned, Turkish channels are unbelievably popular among the Azerbaijani minority who live in Iran. Nearly all Azerbaijani Turkish speakers who live in Iran watch Turkish channels through satellite receivers. Various channels provided by Turkish media are enjoyed by a large number of people ranging from child to adult. Such popularity of Turkish media among the Azerbaijani minority could be attributed to the realistic representation of Turkish ethnicity and particularly Azerbaijani ethnic group in Turkish channels. In contrast to Iran media, where mere attention is given to Persian language and culture, where Persian speakers are represented as ideal, educated, attractive, and perfect individuals, and where Azerbaijani Turks are portrayed and represented as people who are worthless and have ridiculous behaviors, Turkish media represents Turkish ethnicities as ideal and respectable ones who have had a rich history and civilization. Hence, Azerbaijani minority do not find themselves trivialized or stigmatized while watching Turkish media. Vast number of programs offered by Turkish media provides an environment for Azerbaijani minority to feel safer because their ethnic identity is not threatened when they watch TV.

The importance of Turkish channels on the one hand and its popularity among the Azerbaijani minority living in Iran interested the researchers to investigate the popularity of Turkish media among the Azerbaijani minority in Iran and its effect on their Turkish language learning. As far as the researchers are concerned, it seems no study has conducted to study the popularity Turkish channels among the Azerbaijani minority inhabited in Iran.

4. Method of the Study

In order to investigate the popularity of Turkish media amongst the Azerbaijani minority who live in Iran and to study the effects of Turkish media on their Turkish language learning, a questionnaire was devised and sent out through emails to 345 Azerbaijani people living throughout Iran and exactly 298 were returned. Some of the respondents were interviewed. However, only 282 of them were taken to final evaluation since some of them lacked the information required. Data was analyzed using SPSS package program (Version 11.5). Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the demographic information of the participants. In the two of the questions, we tried to get some demographic information about the respondents. The questions inquired their age and gender. In the last five questions, attempt was made to investigate the popularity and effect of Turkish media. They were analyzed in detail.

5. Findings and Discussion

Sixty seven percent of the participants were female while thirty three percents were male. Demographic information gathered via a questionnaire revealed that nearly 38 % of the
respondents (N = 107) were aging from 21 to 30. The information about their age is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic information about the age of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-11</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-20</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>282</td>
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In the third question, attempt was made to gain insight into which channels Azerbaijani minority prefer to watch. It was investigated to realize whether they prefer to watch Persian or Turkish channels. Nearly 78% of the respondents went for the second option (Turkish channels), while 22% would rather watch Persian channels. The fourth question asked if they prefer to watch Turkish channels, how many hours they prefer to watch each day. According to the results of the study, the Azerbaijani people who preferred Turkish channels to Persian channels turned out to watch Turkish channels four to five hours a day.

The fifth question aimed at obtaining some information about Turkish programs which are the most popular ones amongst the members of Azerbaijani family groups. The respondents were expected to rate their choices from the most popular to the least popular programs. Some options were given. The most popular TV programs of female participants older than thirty years old seem to be Turkish soap operas, marriage programs, talk shows, music, and movies form the most popular to the least popular respectively. In addition, for the female participants from 21 to 30 the popular programs turn out to be Turkish soap operas, entertainment programs, music channels, and movies respectively. The female participants aging form 12 to 20 prefer to watch Turkish soap operas, entertainment programs.

In contrast, the male participants older than thirty prefer to watch Turkish soap operas, news, entertainment programs, and movies respectively. For the male participants ranging form 21 to 30, the most popular Turkish programs are Turkish soap operas, movies, music, and entertainment programs. The male participants aging 12 to 20 prefer Turkish soap operas, entertainment programs, and music channels. As it is evident, Turkish soap operas are the most popular TV programs for all the male and female participants who are older than 12 years old.

The purpose of the sixth question was to get some information on whether the participants have difficulty understanding Turkey Turkish while watching Turkish channels. Twelve percent of the participants believe that they have difficulty when they watched Turkish
channels. However, eighty eight percent say that they have little trouble understanding Turkish language.

The seventh question was asked to realize Turkish programs which are more popular among kids to watch at home. They were also asked to point to the amount of the time they watch Turkish programs. Sixty three percent of individuals ranging from five to eleven years old prefer Turkish cartoon channels to animated cartoon translated to Persian language and they watch Turkish cartoons three to four hours a day.

6. Conclusion

TV can help people improve listening skills, exposing them to the language when it is spoken at real world pace. So watching TV is a great way to learn particularly second languages. Getting media exposure enables people to learn languages similar to their own. In this study, the case of Azerbaijani minority and the effect of media on their Turkish language learning were explored. According to the results of the study, it seems that media, TV in particular, could have an important role in language learning. This could be strengthened when the language of the channels is considered as a second language for the people watching them. The study sheds light to the significant role of the media in general and TV channels in particular. As it is evident, it seems that Turkish media has had a big role in Turkish language learning of Azerbaijani minority living in Iran.

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