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2016

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Come, Let's Wrestle: Language and the Struggle for Authority in Online Persian Social Networking Sites

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Come, Let's Wrestle: Language and the Struggle for Authority in Online Persian Social Networking Sites

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2016

Dedication

For my brother

Acknowledgements

I want to begin by thanking my committee for their generosity and support at every step of this journey. I thank Elizabeth Keating, in whose course on language and power I first began examining the ideas that later developed into this project. Her expertise and insights on computer-mediated communication was particularly helpful as I made progress in this study and her thoughtful feedback has been invaluable. I thank Luis Urrieta for helping me navigate the daunting IRB process and for his valuable insights on ethnographic methods. Without his willingness to guide me through the different aspects of designing an ethnography, this project would not have taken shape. I thank Kristen Brustad for the enthusiasm and encouragement she's showed for this project from its very inception and for the hours spent discussing the sociolinguistic of performance. I am very grateful to have had her support throughout my time at UT. I thank Kamran Aghaie for contributing his insights as a fellow Iranian American and for his support over the years as department chair and as director of the center. Lastly, I thank Blake Atwood. I don't know where I would be without his unconditional support and encouragement over the past several years. I thank him for being so generous with his time, for his thoughtful and thorough feedback on all of my drafts and for his invaluable guidance in every aspect of this process. I also thank him for being such an amazing example of commitment, service and humility as a friend, a teacher and a scholar. His friendship means so much to me.

I want to show appreciation to my family and friends. I thank my parents for always being so supportive and encouraging of my various endeavors, for their selfless, unconditional love, for teaching me to be curious about the world from the very beginning and for inspiring me with their enthusiasm for learning. I thank my brother for all he's taught me about resilience and hope and for showing me—through his music—that art and performance allow beauty to persist even in dark times. I'm also grateful to the many members of my extended family, especially Susan, Pauline and Faraj Afrasiabi, for always being in my corner, and to my cousins Ladan and Helen for their warmth and humor and for having done for providing the sense of shared experience and connection that vines do for the members of the Iranian Vines community long before Facebook ever existed. I am also thankful to my friends and have been lucky to have met so many kindred spirits: to Goli Bagheri, my second-generation bestie, for her consistent encouragement and support and for making me laugh during stressful times. To Nandini Dhar for being such a devoted friend and co-editor, for our many inspiring conversations at different coffee shops around Austin and for providing encouragement and reassurance throughout this process. To Cate Blouke for her sage advice, her supportive phone calls and her baked goods. Lindsay Meyer for her humor and down-to-earthness, for always being there for me with her supportive texts and calls and for her appreciation of *Kolah Ghermezi*. To Tara McGrath for always being so encouraging of my academic pursuits and for all the times spent laughing and talking at diners across the Los Angeles area over the past ten years. To Adam Cameron for first directing my attention to Iranian Vines as a potential site for research and for our many nerdy and

enthusiastic conversations about our shared love for Persian and linguistic anthropology.

Come, Let's Wrestle: Language and the Struggle for Authority in Persian Social Networking Sites

Dena Afrasiabi, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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This dissertation builds on prior scholarship in linguistic anthropological studies of performance to examine transnational spaces in online social networks where members of the Iranian diaspora use emerging technologies to interact with one another in ways that highlight the tensions between them. The focal point of this project will be the Facebook page Iranian Vines, which features short (5-15 second long) comedic videos that address issues unique to the experiences of Iranians living in diaspora. While many second-generation Iranians use online spaces to linguistically construct a hybridized identity, first-generation Iranians use these same spaces to evaluate the authenticity of these constructed identities by policing the language used by performers and deciding on the linguistic legitimacy of their performances. I argue that the performative nature of the Iranian Vines page creates a space for first-generation Iranians to

respond to global sociolinguistic hierarchies that value English over Persian by acting as gatekeepers of Iranian authenticity through linguistic prescriptivism.

Second-generation Iranians, on the other hand, use performance to decontextualize (and thus make visible) the moments of difference that define their particular vantage point and to acquire sociolinguistic capital through humor. These performers use "identity-switching," a practice in which they juxtapose performances of non-Iranian and Iranian identity for comedic effect to challenge sociolinguistic hierarchies within the Iranian community that value monolingualism or parallel bilingualism. A core focus of this dissertation will be the ways that emerging technologies shape power relations between members of this community by making visible the processes by which members of ethnolinguistic communities negotiate the relationship between identity and language.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the end of her bestselling memoir *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*, TIME journalist Azadeh Moaveni describes an unexpected moment of identity performance that takes place at her grandfather's funeral in Northern California. In delivering a spontaneous eulogy, her cousin Dara uses English-Persian codeswitching in such a way that leads--much to Moaveni's surprise--to an outburst of raucous laughter in an audience of primarily older, socially conservative Iranians.[1] Such a moment defies both the social conventions associated with funerals and the expectation that Dara would speak either only English (given the presence of non-Iranians in the audience) or only Persian. This moment exemplifies the way performance makes permissible speech acts that might not otherwise be accepted. Moaveni, herself, spends much of the memoir bemoaning her struggle to achieve the fluency of a native speaker in Persian despite growing up in California. Throughout the first section of the memoir, she describes long evenings spent at home in her apartment in Tehran

[1] Moaveni, Azadeh. *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran.* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005): 241.

with newspapers and dictionaries, underlining unfamiliar words and memorizing their definitions in the hopes of eventually translating her American self into its Iranian version. Her efforts are driven by the belief that an unfragmented Iranian self exists dormant in her mind, and that the right words will bring her back to life. Her frustration with learning Persian ultimately stems not from her struggle with the language itself but from the discovery that she doesn't possess the tools necessary for translating the many parts of her personality she wishes to express in Persian; the right words simply don't exist. For Moaveni, achieving native speaker fluency in Persian symbolizes the attainment of an idealized Iranian identity, one that is whole rather than fragmented, pure rather than diluted with outside influences. Moaveni's struggle to piece together her fragmented identity through language demonstrates the persistence of essentialist ideologies that view identity as pre-existent to discourse.[2] The moment of bilingual humor at the funeral disrupts this narrative of Iranian identity as an ideal achieved through linguistic mastery. Dara's performance offers an alternative to both Moaveni's essentialist understanding of idealized Iranian identity and to what Thurlow and Mroczek (2011) refer to as

[2] Auer, Peter. "A Postscript: code-switching and social identity." *Journal of Pragmatics* 37 (2005): 406.

"extreme social constructionism,"[3] the notion of identity as entirely emergent through interaction. This incongruous moment of comedic performance at a funeral not only allows for a performance of second-generation identity, but also remains in Moaveni's memory as a rare instance of diasporic harmony:

> Exiles spent so much of their lives adrift through time; grieving for the past, pruning regrets, bracing for a future that was anticipated rather than lived. But in those seconds of surprised laughter we lived, collectively and wholly, in the present, an unfamiliar place we seldom met alone, even more rarely together.[4]

By decontextualizing a brief instance of code-switching, Moaveni draws attention to the connection between individual language use and the formation of collective identity.

The scene described above reflects how performance allows a displaced collective to locate themselves firmly within the liminal space they occupy by providing them with a frame. Frames, a concept central to performance, cue audience members to take form into consideration when interpreting a speech

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[3] Thurlow, Crispin & Mroczek, Kristine "Introduction: Fresh Perspectives on New Media Sociolinguistics." in Thurlow, Crispin & Mroczek, Kristine (eds.) *Digital Discourse: Language in the New Media*. (New York: Oxford University Press: 2011), xxiv.

[4] Moaveni, Azadeh. *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran.* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005): 242.

act to determine its communicative intent.[5] While, as Moaveni suggests, geographical displacement alters migrants' relationship to time, compelling them to cope by either romanticizing the past or anxiously anticipating the future, linguistic performance offers a vehicle for negotiating the discomfort of in-betweenness. Informal, impromptu folk-performances like Dara's create a transnational space where members of displaced communities collectively negotiate their cultural identity and frame linguistic style as an act of identity. Performance momentarily suspends the ordinary rules of everyday interaction;[6] as such, it allows for new renderings of cultural and social boundaries that might be met with more resistance and ridicule outside of this frame. As global flows increasingly change the way that people and communities relate to space,[7] investigating performance becomes integral to understanding how displaced populations negotiate and renegotiate borders and identities through folk practices. Evidence of this need to engage with borders and identity through performance and, more broadly, through creativity, can be found in the vast

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[5] Goffman, Erving *Frame Analysis*: an essay on the organization of experience. (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1986) p. 10.

[6] Shuck, Gail. "Conversational performance and the poetic construction of an ideology." *Language in Society* 33.2 (2004)

[7] Mezzadra, Sandro. "Between Inclusion and Exclusion: On the Topology of Global Space and Borders." *Theory, Culture & Society* 29 (4/5) (2012): 58-75.

bodies of creative work produced by migrant populations over the past several decades that deal either explicitly or implicitly with questions of identity and space. From visual art, television[8] and global cinema to parades and street performance, creative expression not only affords members of displaced communities tools for engaging one another across geographical boundaries, it locates them within the global marketplace. Before the advent of Web 2.0,[9] which led to the proliferation of user-generated content online, creative expressions of liminality through public performance once required resources (financial and social) not accessible to the majority immigrants, particularly those whose communities have not been long established in the host country. Before the widespread use of online spaces for public, creative expressions of exilic and immigrant experiences, this type of cultural production was largely limited to a select minority working in such media as visual arts, cinema, television,

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[8]See, for example: Naficy, Hamid. *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Naficy, Hamid. *Accented Cinema: exilic and diasporic film making*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Malek, Amy. "Public Performances of Identity Negotiation in the Iranian Diaspora. The New York Persian Day Parade." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and The Middle East* 31.2 (2011)

[9] Web 2.0 refers to the advent of more social networking sites like Facebook and YouTube which allowed for the proliferation of user-generated content, as opposed to Web 1.0, where users mostly acted as consumers rather than creators. Web 2.0 also includes the emergence of inexpensive, easy to use blogging platforms. For a more detailed discussion of the differences between these two phases of the world wide web, see Cormode, G. and Krishnamurthy, B. (2008).

performing arts and literature. The advancement of technology within the past decade has made it possible for anyone with access to the internet and a smartphone to perform cultural commentary through a broad range of genres and tools previously unavailable to them. This is not to overstate the significance of technological innovations or suggest, like some early scholars of computer-mediated communication, that technology has revolutionized communication. If anything, technology makes visible the banality of globalization, reinforcing the idea that the existing sociolinguistic order and its accompanying ideologies persist even within new communicative contexts.[10]

Rather than significantly alter the mechanics of everyday interaction, the internet has impacted communication within displaced communities by offering tools which have facilitated creative articulations of existing sociolinguistic phenomena (e.g. identity, linguistic power relations, language ideologies, stylization) and increased access to these performances for a greater number of people worldwide. Perhaps more importantly, online technologies have changed the way that members of displaced communities engage with notions of identity

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[10] Thurlow, Crispin and Jaworski, Adam. "Banal Globalization? Embodied Actions and Mediated Practices in Tourists' Online Photo Sharing." In *Digital Discourses: Language in the New Media*

by transforming our understanding of space and place. The recent emphasis on "new media" and its effect on communication obscures the true import of CMC by underlining the impact of individual technological innovations. One of the goals of this project is to expand the body of scholarship that shows the "newness" of new media stems not from recent advancements in digital technology but from one of its primary byproducts: the transformation in the way people engage with space, which in turn affects the way individuals and communities articulate identity. Online spaces provide fertile ground for the investigation of identity in diaspora because of the equally porous boundaries of transnational and online spaces.

Concurrently to the impact of digital technology on migrants' relationship to space, scholarship on diaspora has shifted from one that views diaspora as an entity made up of displaced members of an ethnic community to one that understands diaspora as a set of practices through which individuals imaginatively negotiate their relationship with home and host countries.[11]

The past two decades has seen the emergence of spaces online which act as gathering places for displaced communities. These so-called virtual diasporas

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[11] Brubaker, Rogers. "The diaspora diaspora." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28.1 (2005)

have been said to complement and mimic their offline counterparts, providing the type of support, exchange of information and opportunities for connection one might find in an ethnic neighborhood.[12] Yet as the advent of Web 2.0 and the increasingly blurred borders between physical and virtual spaces has transformed the way that displaced communities interact with one another and negotiate their identities, these transformations necessitate a reevaluation of the very concept of diaspora. Thus, spaces like the online community Iranian Vines at the heart of this project, don't just represent an online version of an offline phenomenon, nor does the space represent an entirely unfamiliar articulation of identity, as an extreme social constructionist view might infer. Rather, as I argue, this space frames diaspora not just as a set of practices, but as a series of performances. Collectively, these performances construct a narrative of identity that's rife with fragmentation, contradiction and struggles over the power to define the parameters of authenticity as well as what it means to be a moral person within this transnational space. Framing diaspora in terms of performance allows us to locate diasporic practices somewhere between

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[12] Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996).

essentialist ideas of national identity and extreme constructionist views that see both diasporic and technological renderings of identity as completely emergent phenomena.

This project uses the virtual ethnography of the Facebook page Iranian Vines as a site for investigating how the convergence of internet technologies and global cultural flows enhances the performative nature of communication in transnational spaces. Through ethnographic observation and conversation analysis, this project demonstrates that the permeable boundaries of online technologies shape the power dynamics of transnational spaces. While influenced by the top-down structures of these spaces and their organization, individuals nonetheless use grass-roots practices to challenge existing sociolinguistic hierarchies from the bottom up. Specifically, second-generation Iranians (those born outside of Iran or who moved there as young children) use performance to reposition themselves within sociolinguistic hierarchies that devalue bilingual, bicultural identity by using their awareness of cultural collisions as a source of social capital through humor.[13] The metacommunicative

[13] Da Silva, Emanuel. "Humor (re)positioning ethnolinguistic identities: 'You tink is funny?'" *Language in Society* 44.2 (2015).

nature of performance renders the online community into a fourth space, an arena where individuals not only locate their identities between home and host cultures but also self-consciously demonstrate their awareness of this in-between position, framing their Liminality as a source of sociolinguistic capital.

First-generation Iranian immigrants (those who left Iran as adults), meanwhile, appear less interested in performing their identities than in acting as gatekeepers of Iranian authenticity. The performance frame, which encourages audience evaluation of speech acts[14] as well as the built-in evaluative structure of Facebook, enhance their role as language police. By policing Persian language use, these members link Iranian authenticity to linguistic legitimacy, circulating ideologies of linguistic purism embedded within a larger framework of nationalist ideologies.

Although social constructivism has led to the acknowledgement of nationalism and national identity as imagined[15] and invented[16], understanding encounters between members of online diasporas within this framework offers

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[14] Bauman, Richard and Briggs, Charles L. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology 19* (1990).

[15] Anderson, Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

[16] Bhaba, Homi. (Ed.) *Nation and Narration*. (London: Routledge, 1990).

insights into the ways in which such ideologies persist at the level of interaction and continue to impact how individuals view the role of language in identity construction despite the changes brought about by global cultural flows.

Just as national identity is imagined, the categories of native and heritage speaker used here to identity members of the diaspora community with varying degrees of emotional and psychic distance from their home culture do not exist as a fixed binary. Rather, such categories function as tools for examining sociolinguistic practices such as the discursive construction of transnational identities and linguistic prescriptivism in the form of language policing.

Iranian Vines

Upon entering the Facebook page for Iranian Vines, the central site of analysis for this project, one finds a mosaic of fragmented identity performances similar to the one that took place spontaneously at Moaveni's grandfather's funeral. Vines, 5-15 second online videos first developed by Twitter, were used prior to the establishment of the Iranian Vines page to create a range of highly compressed performances that have nothing to do with ethnic identity.[17] Vines

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[17] "Twitter Buys Vine, a Video Clip Company That Never Launched." *All Things D,* October 9, 2012. http://allthingsd.com/20121009/twitter-buys-vine-a-video-clip-company-that-never-launched/

began as an app developed in 2012 for the Apple iPhone that allowed users to create six second videos that incorporated multiple short shots into a continuous shot. The social networking site Twitter subsequently acquired Vines in late 2012 and launched the application in early 2013.[18] Vines.com has a similar structure to that of Twitter: users create a profile where they post their own or "re-vine" others' performances, with the most recent post appearing at the top of the page. Each user also has followers who subscribe to their page and follows others' profiles.[19] The copy on the Vines home page advertises the site as an "entertainment network where trends begin and blow up…these trends evolve and extend beyond our phones."[20] This notion of media flow proves accurate when observing the migration of vines to other networks: Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. The statement also alludes to the internet meme phenomenon, a concept that describes the way a particular theme or trend spreads from one network to another.

While Iranian Vines began to appear individually on the Vines page in June of 2013, searchable via the hashtag #iranianvines, they didn't migrate to

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[18] Ibid

[19] https://vine.co/

[20] https://vine.co/trends

Facebook until a few months later in October.[21] The top of the Vines page describes the sites as a "community," and indeed this feature distinguishes the Facebook page from the Iranian vines found on the Vines site itself. Whereas users of the official Vines site post their performances on an individual profile and receive comments, no page exists on that site where makers and viewers of Iranian vines collectively gather. This absence of a community space perhaps explains the creation of the Iranian Vines page in October of 2013. While on the one hand, the presence of a moderator who selects vines sent to her via email limits the freedom of those who create vines (the Vines.com page allows users to post their own content without going through a moderator), placing the vines in one place makes it easier to identify themes and facilitates contestation, both between performers competing for attention in the form of likes and comments and between performers and viewers.

In the context of Facebook pages devoted to individual ethnolinguistic communities, vines become a powerful vehicle for the performance of fragmentation. These performances encapsulate the everyday cultural collisions that occur in the lives of individuals belonging to displaced communities. As

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[21] Iranian Vines https://www.facebook.com/Vines.Iranian/?fref=ts

such, these videos constitute "inside jokes," performances that recreate and decontextualize moments specific to the experience of belonging to a community. By creating jokes only accessible to members of their particular community, participants on these pages strengthen ingroup solidarity while at times sacrificing solidarity with other groups (such as the dominant culture of their country) to which they might belong. While the Iranian Vines page only remained active from October of 2013 until April 2014, the performances and conversations still accessible on the site (as of March 2016) offer a visual tapestry (albeit a tattered one) of inside jokes that narrate Iranian identity through difference.

Background on Iranian Diaspora

The emigration of Iranians to other parts of the world occurred in three distinct waves,[22] with the first beginning in the early part of the 20th century and lasting until 1979, the second wave beginning after the revolution and lasting until the mid-1990s and a third wave that began around 1995 and continues through today. Each wave consisted of a population with different demographic

[22] Hakimzadeh, Shirin. "Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home." *Migration Policy Institute*, September 1, 2006. http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/iran-vast-diaspora-abroad-and-millions-refugees-home/ All statistics and accompanying information about the three waves of Iranian immigration have been taken from this site.

characteristics and motivations for leaving. The first wave largely consisted of religious minorities fleeing persecution and individuals from wealthier families who could afford to send them abroad to complete their education. The motivations for the second wave stemmed from political events surrounding the revolution of 1979, including the Iran-Iraq war that began the following year. The largest number of Iranians left the country during this wave, a group that included the educated elite, political dissidents fleeing persecution, royalists with ties to the Shah's government, young men escaping military service during the war and families with young women wanting to avoid new gender restrictions implemented by the revolutionary government. A defining characteristic of these first two waves was the notion that many of the Iranians leaving the country would eventually return to Iran once they had completed their education (first wave) or once the political climate settled (second wave), a belief that compelled many of the Iranians who left Iran at the time to identify themselves as exiles or expatriates rather than immigrants. This exile/expatriate identity becomes a focal point of much of the literature, cinema and television produced by Iranians outside of Iran during the second wave of immigration.

The third wave, meanwhile, consists of working class laborers and economic refugees on the one hand and individuals with a high level of education in highly-valued skills on the other hand, resulting in a continuation of the "brain drain" that began with the second wave of emigration. It should be noted that some scholars only acknowledge the existence of two waves, perhaps because the third wave has occurred relatively recently. Individuals who emigrated during this third wave are less likely to see themselves as exiles or expatriates and more likely to consider their leaving permanent, since the decision to emigrate stemmed largely from a lack of economic and/or educational opportunities at home. Third wave immigrants leaving Iran encountered pre-existing communities of Iranians in their host countries, many of whom had lived outside of Iran for several decades. Whereas Iranians leaving Iran around the time of the 1979 revolution arrived in other countries during a time when few Iranians had established themselves in new countries, the more recent wave of relatively young immigrants leaving Iran for their education or to pursue better economic opportunities come into contact with Iranians who have come of age outside of Iran. Further, the immigrants leaving Iran during the more recent wave constitute the first group of Iranians to have come of age in the

Islamic Republic. The emergence of these two new groups—Iranians who have grown up in the Islamic Republic, and a large group of Iranians who have grown up outside of Iran, have altered the demographic and linguistic composition of the Iranian community outside of Iran. While the community's diasporic practices, themselves, have not necessarily changed, this shift in demographics has affected the social dynamics of diaspora communities, as demonstrated by the interactions observed online.

The political and social upheavals that took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Iran not only led to a mass exodus of Iranians, they also created a culture of hostility toward Iran and Iranians in the countries where they settled. The Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-81, in particular, fueled hatred and discrimination against Iranians living in the U.S., many of whom did not support the government that had taken U.S. citizens hostage. The hostility sparked by the hostage crisis not only created a culture of discrimination toward Iranians and ostracized them from mainstream U.S. society, it often led to physical violence, to the extent that Middle Easterners mistaken for Iranians began wearing t-shirts

that displayed their nationalities in order to prevent beatings.[23] Faced with such demonstrations of hostility, many Iranians in the U.S. chose to identify themselves as Persian rather than Iranian, in an effort to distance themselves from the actions and ideologies of the new Iranian government. Some Iranians referred to themselves as Persian or adopted a false ethnic identity, such as Italian or Greek, occurred as the result of the trauma of the hostage crisis.[24]

The struggle for Iranians to acclimate to their new homes amidst ongoing political strife within Iran and between Iran and the U.S. has led scholars in Iranian studies to examine the effects of such traumas on the formation of Iranian or Persian American identity in the U.S..[25] Such scholarship takes for granted the notion of diaspora as an entity with a distinct identity, even while acknowledging the ethnic, religious and socioeconomic heterogeneity of this group. Mostofi (2003) for instance defines Iranian diasporic identity in the U.S. as "a combination of (1) American notions of freedom and liberty" and (2) Iranian cultural traditions and concepts of the family." Such a definition reinscribes

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[23] Mobasher, Mohsen "Cultural Trauma and Ethnic Identity Formation Among Iranian Immigrants in the U.S." *American Behavioral Scientist* 50.1 ((2006): 108.

[24] Ibid., 113.

[25] See Sabagh, G. & Bozorgmehr (1994); Mostofi (2003)

essentialist notions of ethnic identity and undermines the complexity of cultural identity negotiation in its myriad forms. This dissertation moves away from the concept of diaspora as bounded entity and instead draws from Brubaker (2005)'s definition of diaspora as "an idiom, a stance, a claim…a category of practice."[26] This definition better serves the post-constructionist views of identity that inform this project, taken from Bell & Briggs who conceptualize identity between essentialism and its opposite extreme:

> Persons cannot be defined as a bundle of static, sociometric categories, although they do reflect the social strands of their histories. Nor are they definable as just moment-by-moment creations in the stream of interaction, although their traits are fluidly present in different and changing situations.[27]

This view of identity acknowledges both the speaker's agency in interaction and the social categories and forces that impose limitations on an individual actor's freedom in expressing linguistic articulations of self.

1.3 Overview of the Dissertation

The next chapter outline the methods used for the analysis of the Iranian Vines page and describes the site in greater detail. By providing background

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[26] Brubaker, Rogers. "The diaspora diaspora." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2005) 28.1: 12.

[27] Bell, Alan & Gibson, Andy. "Staging Language: An Introduction to the Sociolinguistics of Performance." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15.5 (2011): 559.

information on the Iranian Vines site and discussing the research methods used for data collection and analysis, this chapter contextualizes the analytical chapters that follow. The details about the structure of the space in this chapter also pave the way for the discussion on how space shapes the social dynamics of the site.

Chapter 3 conceptualizes the Iranian Vines page as a space in order to examine how the structure of the virtual community contributes to the sociolinguistic practices that occur there. This chapter shows how top-down forces, such as the structure of the site and its embeddedness in Facebook's system of evaluation, encourage the stancetaking practices that characterize interactions between participants. By looking at the ways in which users of the site blur boundaries between physical and virtual spaces this chapter lays the groundwork for understanding how the convergence of online spaces and diasporic practices allows participants to negotiate the boundaries of Iranian authenticity and re-position themselves within existing sociolinguistic hierarchies.

Building on the theoretical foundation laid out in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 focuses on two second-generation Iranian mocking practices that emerge out of

the structure of the space: identity-switching and metalinguistic mocking. Focusing on these two practices demonstrates how heritage Persian speakers use performance to push back against hierarchies that value essentialist notions of Iranian authenticity and linguistic purism. Through identity-switching (or identity-manipulation), a practice enhanced by the compression of the vines, these participants use their bilingualism to underscore their facility in maneuvering between multiple identities. Through humor, these performers use their subject position to acquire sociolinguistic capital.

Chapter 5 responds to the discussion of second-generation practices in Chapter 4 by examining the role of first-generation Iranians as gatekeepers of Iranian authenticity through the practice of language policing. These participants use their evaluative roles as audience members to judge the legitimacy of heritage Persian. Just as second-generation Iranians use mocking to reposition themselves within existing sociolinguistic hierarchies informing their interactions, linguistic prescriptivism allows first-generation speakers to challenge dominant global hierarchies that value English over Persian. By acting as gatekeepers of authenticity, these speakers can frame their Persian-English own code-switching as acts of Iranian identity while still claiming the

sociolinguistic capital that accompanies knowledge of English. Chapter 6 offers a discussion of my findings along with future directions for this research. Taken together, the analytical chapters presented here provide a linguistic ethnographic analysis of Iranian diasporic practices, using the Iranian Vines page as a lens through which to examine how changing understandings of space impact the way displaced individuals negotiate their identities through language.

Chapter 2: Methods

This chapter will discuss the theoretical frameworks and methods used for collecting and analyzing the data in this study. This project focuses primarily on the use of social networking sites as spaces where members of the Iranian diaspora perform and/or evaluate linguistic constructions of Iranian identity. In order to investigate the ways in which emerging technologies enhance our sociolinguistic understanding of identity, I conducted a virtual ethnography of the Facebook page, Iranian Vines, which emerged in October of 2013. I collected data from this site beginning in December of 2013 and continuing through December of 2015. Using such ethnographic methods as participant observation and discourse analysis, I studied the performances of and interactions between users of the site in order to better understand the methods by which they negotiated their identities, positioned and/or repositioned themselves on various sociolinguistic hierarchies and use language to battle over the right to define the parameters of Iranian authenticity. In addition to studying the performances and interactions that appeared on the site, I also applied methods of analysis used by

scholars of linguistic landscapes in order to study how the structure of the online space itself contributes to the exchange of symbolic power by participants.

Theoretical Framework

This project draws from the following related theoretical frameworks: sociolinguistics of performance & performativity, language ideology scholarship, stylistics and linguistic landscapes. Much of the earlier wave of research on Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has focused disproportionately on the novelty of technological innovations and their effects on communication. This project aims to move in the direction of the new wave of digital discourse research, which acknowledges that all discourse is to some extent mediated, and regards technology as an appendage to existing human behavior, including discursive practices,[28] rather than as a novelty that significantly alters patterns of human communication or results in heretofore unseen sociolinguistic phenomena.

Applying existing sociolinguistic theories to an online space supports the breakdown of false binaries between online and offline spaces. The development

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[28] Keating, Elizabeth. 2005. "Homo Prostheticus: problematizing the notions of activity and computer-mediated interaction. *Discourse Studies* 7(4/5).

of Web 2.0 and the increasing importance of social networking sites to individuals' daily lives, complicates the traditional separation between online and offline spaces. This blurring of boundaries necessitates an investigation of language use in online spaces not as purely representative of offline dynamics nor completely separate from them. Rather, investigating the ways that online spaces make everyday sociolinguistic phenomena visible and the ways that the structure of these spaces affords opportunities for reinforcing and pushing back against sociolinguistic hierarchies allows for an understanding of these spaces as intricately connected.

Research Site

Facebook

By linking members of the global diaspora community through individual social networks as well as through pages that bring together individuals according to shared interests or goals, Facebook functions as a transnational space where members of diaspora gather across geographical lines (Stewart, 2013). Iranians in and out of Iran use Facebook groups and pages to foster social ties, organize politically, and exchange information. A search for "Iran" in Persian results in well over 2,000 pages dedicated to various Iranian institutions,

organizations and groups formed around a shared interest. Examples of pages formed around shared interests include “Ancient Languages and Cultures of Iran,” “The Music of Iran,” and “Iran History.” Pages that connect likeminded individuals include “Iranian Atheists and Agnostics” which has close to 200,000 members, and Typing “Iranian” into Facebook’s search field yields 314 different pages (as of February 2016) for organizations, associations, interests and groups around the world. A search for Persian yielded an additional 533 results related to Iranian culture and the Persian language. Topics of these pages range from newspaper and media outlets to communities of professionals living in the same region to interests such as Iranian music or poetry. Facebook users can use these pages to make or maintain professional and personal connections with others with whom they might also share offline connections, as in the case of groups such as “Toronto Iranian Moms” or “Iranian Vegetarians in Australia.” Users also subscribe to pages as a way of listing their interests on their personal profile page. “Liking” a page adds that page to a list of likes featured on the profile page, connects a user to other users within that page and sends posts by the community on that page into the individual user’s news feed.

Iranian Vines

Like all group pages, the Iranian Vines page shares the same basic features as an individual's personal profile page. When logging onto the page, one encounters a small profile picture consisting of the words Iranian Vines in white cursive font against a green background, two of the colors on the Iranian flag. A silhouette of the Persian word for Persian appears behind the English words, connecting the two. The profile picture appears in the left-hand corner, embedded within a much larger rectangular cover photo that also features the words Iranian Vines in English and the word Persian in Persian script. Here, however, the font for the English words is far larger than the Persian, the opposite of the profile photo. The words Iranian Vines appear again in a less elaborate font to the right of the profile picture with the word Community beneath. The background of the cover photo vaguely resembles a world map in gray and white, though the countries remain indistinguishable. Scrolling down the page, one finds thumbnails of vines arranged vertically like a photo album, with previews of the comments beneath. Most of these photos feature close-ups of young performers, their faces frozen in sometimes comical expressions. The left-hand side of the page consists of thumbnails of the site's photos and of the three most recently posted vines. An "About" section displays the moderator's

email address, to which viewers can send their own vines for consideration. Unlike profile pages for individuals and group pages that allow anyone to post, the members of this page (aside from the moderator) can only participate by commenting on and liking vines and comments. A button above the "About" section allows viewers to invite their Facebook friends to "like," the page. A box above this button displays the number of people who have liked the page.

Viewers can access the site three different ways: 1) Facebook users can "like" the page, which subscribes them to the group and includes new posts in their news feed, which they view when logging into their Facebook account: 2) Facebook users can view the page without subscribing but can still participate using like and share buttons and by posting comments: 3) non-Facebook users (individuals who do not possess an active Facebook account) can still view the page, watch vines and read comments but do not have the capacity to "like" or share vines or comments or to participate in the comments sections. Given the possibility for users and non-users of Facebook to participate on these pages passively, the exact total number of participants cannot be calculated. For the purposes of this study, however, only members who actively participate (meaning they have subscribed to the page and/or contribute to the page through

commentary, posting vines or liking/sharing other members' postings) will be included in the analysis.

As of February 2016, the Iranian Vines page had 37,199 likes. As mentioned above, this number does not encompass all the members of the site, since viewers can still access vines without liking the page or even without the possession of a Facebook account. The number also fluctuates as subscribers deactivate their Facebook accounts or unsubscribe from the page. Further, while the above represents the number of people who participate passively by subscribing to the page, the highest number of likes received by any given vine was 5,343 as of the same time period. This vine, "When Iranians hear 'Emsho Sheh'" also received the highest number of comments with 1,175. The disparity between the total number of people subscribed to the site and the highest number of likes and comments received by a single vine represents the difficulty of assessing the exact size of this community. Rather than provide an exact number of participants, these figures provide a gauge for approximating the size of the community.

Data Collection

Performative Data

Since this study focuses on the use of performance and performative language on social networking sites as vehicles for ideological agendas, online performances made up a significant portion of the internet data collected through observation. The collection of observational data began in the fall of 2013, when the moderator started posting vines on the page and continued through December 2015, approximately twenty months after the last vine had been posted. I selected vines for my analysis based on their relevance to the sociolinguistic practices on which I wished to focus: identity-switching, metalinguistic mocking and stancetaking. For identity-switching, I looked for vines by performers who introduced their juxtaposed performances using a third persona that functioned as a stand-in for the performer's "true" self. Additionally, I looked for vines that used the identity-switching structure in such a way that highlighted their ability to move between cultures. In vines created by performers identified as first-generation Iranians, I selected identity-switching vines in which the performer directly addressed the theme of authenticity, vines in which the two personas performed represented different possibilities for engaging with displacement or global cultural flows. For metalinguistic mocking, I selected vines in which the performer directly commented on the Persian

language or differences between Persian and English in a humorous way in order to demonstrate his or her knowledge of linguistic nuances. Though nearly all the vines on the Iranian Vines page consist of stancetaking in some form, I chose a vine whose performance functions as metacommentary on a different vine on the site in order to show how vines creators use their performances to take a stance in response to other vines. In addition to vines in which performers demonstrate these practices, I also selected vines pertaining to the role of space in the interactions studied here. In total, I selected fifteen vines: eight identity-switching vines, three vines demonstrating metalinguistic mocking, one stancetaking vine and two vines that deal with the role of space. Once I selected relevant vines I saved them to my hard drive and transcribed their comments in a word document so that I could later access them. I also recorded the number of likes, comments and shares received for the vines, since the evaluative component is an important part of the analysis, particularly in relation to stancetaking. The numbers of likes and comments were subject to fluctuation even after activity on the page ceased, however, as members Though participation on the Iranian Vines page came to a halt in 2014, with no further vines posted after April of that year, comments and likes occasionally disappear

and as users deactivate their Facebook accounts. The page therefore is not entirely static or fossilized but still subject to a degree of flux as members' comments, likes and shares disappear and sometimes reappear.

Interactional Data

This study draws from the interactional sociolinguistics framework that views identity as emerging from rather than preceding interaction.[29] Interactional sociolinguistics was founded by J.J. Gumperz and influenced by the working of Erving Goffman. This framework considers the role of talk in the maintenance of social relationships and focuses in particular on contextual clues that participants use to interpret what is going on in a given interaction. Interactional sociolinguistics also takes into consideration the particular ethnolinguistic context of interaction and the way this context influences cues, leading to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.[30] While an analysis of performance data reveals the linguistic construction of identity by individuals, an analysis of the interactions that take place in the comments sections in response to these performances provides insights into the role of the

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[29] Gumperz, J.J. *Discourse Strategies*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.)

[30] Vine, Bernadette; Holmes, Janet; Marra, Meredith; Pfeifer, Dale; Jackson, Brad. "Exploring Co-leadership Talk Through Interactional Sociolinguistics." *Leadership* 4.3(2008): 339-360.

collective in the negotiation of Iranian identity. Online interactions often blur the lines between performance and everyday interaction because of the evaluative components (like and dislike buttons, for instance) built into the structure of the sites' comment sections. Thus, the analysis of the interactions that take place on the online spaces studied reveals:

a) Attitudes toward performances of identity and their underlying language ideologies
b) Beliefs and attitudes about how a particular performance of identity should be received

While the first category refers to comments that respond directly to vines performances, the second category consists of replies and likes in response to the comments themselves. The responses to comments, in particular, emphasize the performative nature of the comments section as they, too, function as a form of evaluation, just as the comments evaluate the performances. For the purposes of this study, comments in response to vines, replies in response to comments as well as shares and likes all constitute an interaction. In selecting interactions for analysis, I searched for comments that mocked a performance or another comment and comments that expressed a stance in relation to the performer's

language use in order to examine the role of language policing in these interactions.

Demographical Information

On the Iranian Vines page, I collected demographical information for members via their Facebook profile pages. This information included gender, age, hometown, university attended, and current location. I also searched for information that would determine whether an individual identified as a first, second or 1.5 generation Iranian immigrant. Though these categories have sometimes been used interchangeably, I adhere to the following definitions for the purposes of this study: 1) first generation: those who migrated to another country after the age of 12. 2) second generation: the children of first generation immigrants, who were born in another country. 3) 1.5 generation: those who left their home country before the age of 12.[31] For these categories, I looked at individuals' hometown and high school and university information and the primary language used in wall posts. Profiles indicating that an individual attended university in Iran were automatically categorized as first-generation

[31] Rumbaut, Ruben. 2004. "Ages, Life Stages, and Generational Cohorts: Decomposing the Immigrant First and Sescond Generations in the United States. *International Migration Review* 38(3): 1160-1205.

immigrants. In general, 1.5 and second generation Iranians were harder to identify than their first generation counterparts. Not all Facebook profiles provided the necessary information for determining whether an individual identified as a first, second or 1.5 generation Iranian. Facebook's privacy settings allow users to keep their posts and personal information private and therefore unavailable to anyone outside of their friend list.

In addition to determining whether to categorize an individual as first, second or 1.5 generation, I also identified them as heritage or native speakers of Persian. Heritage speaker refers to an individual raised in a home where the family primarily speaks a non-majority language and who has some proficiency in that language.[32] I use the native speaker category to identify anyone who displays greater competency in Persian than in English. Individuals who attended college in Iran, for instance, are considered native speakers, as are those who speak English with an accent. The way an individual positions himself or herself in relation to other participants also provides clues about their identity. Commenters who criticize the language use of heritage Persian speakers, for

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[32] Valdes, Guadalupe. 2000. "The teaching of heritage languages: An introduction for Slavic-teaching professionals". In Kagan, Olga; Rifkin, Benjamin. *The Learning and Teaching of Slavic Languages and Cultures*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers. pp. 375–403

instance, most likely to belong to the first-generation native Persian speaker category. The easiest way to identify a heritage or native speaker on the site was to listen for accents in either English or Persian (in some cases, both). Performers who spoke English with an American accent were automatically categorized as heritage speakers of Persian even if they also displayed near-native Persian proficiency. Persian speakers who spoke English with an Iranian accent, on the other hand, were categorized as native Persian speakers. The range of linguistic proficiency levels in English and Persian complicates this categorization. Heritage Persian speakers range from those who understand Persian and speak at a novice level (according to ACTFL standards) to those who would be considered parallel bilinguals, speakers with native or near-native proficiency in both English and Persian. These categories should not be taken as fixed but rather represent points on a broader spectrum that includes a wide range of proficiency levels, exposure to Persian and positionalities. While I use the terms native and heritage speaker in this project as a tool for identifying different members' relationships to the Persian language and the way they position themselves and each other on the site, the categories should not be seen as

creating a binary, but rather as guideposts for understanding how different speakers negotiate their relationship to language.

Discourse and Conversation Analysis

My methods for analyzing internet data will draw from methods of discourse analysis, which have been applied increasingly in recent years to language and its related modalities in online spaces.[33] Discourse analysis refers to a broad range of methods for analyzing linguistic data. Central to this approach is the idea of language in action or language as action. Methods of discourse analysis range from those that consider the content of linguistic data to those more concerned with grammatical structures.[34] Multimodal discourse analysis provides a multidimensional view of the relationship between online communication and sociolinguistic phenomena. Given the different modes of communication used on the Iranian Vines page, from visual to performative to linguistic, a multimodal approach was necessary for a comprehensive analysis of the different discursive practices used by participants on the site.

Conversation Analysis

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[33] Thurlow, Crispin and Mrcozek, Kristine (eds). *Digital Discourse: Language in the New Media.* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[34] Gee, Paul. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: theory and method* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011).

For interactions taking place in the comments sections beneath each vine, I applied the principles of conversation analysis. Like discourse analysis, conversation analysis regards speech as action, taking into consideration the way that individuals negotiate social relationship through talk.[35] This analytical framework pays special attention to the sequence of interactions and the way speech acts build on one another through turn-taking in order to identify patterns of activity in particular social settings such as workplaces, institutions or interviews.[36] Applying this methodology to the Iranian Vines community offered insights into the particular patterns emerging from interactions in virtual diasporas. Such an analysis also reveals how the structure of social networking sites enhances the performative nature of online language use.

Applying conversation analysis to an online setting carries Online interactions in settings like Facebook complicate the sequential analysis because comments are not spoken utterances and may appear out of order when displayed according to the number of likes they have received. Further, comments in response to recorded performances and in response to one another

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[35] Wooffitt, Robin. *Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis: A Comparative and Critical Introduction.* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2005).

[36] Woofitt, 9.

do not unfold in real time, unlike the interactions traditionally used as data for conversation analysis.[37] The reply feature of the comments section nevertheless facilitates conversations between users of the site to which the conventions of turn-taking apply.

[37] Wooffitt, 10.

Chapter 3: Uses of Space on Iranian Vines

The Iranian Vines page complicates notions of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that characterize both the internet and the imagined community of diaspora. As a space, the page functions as a repository for the fragmented narratives of an imagined Iranian identity and as a place for members of the Iranian community outside of Iran to collectively negotiate the boundaries of Iranian authenticity. The ways that individuals relate to the page as an online community reflects broader trends related to the embodiment of online spaces. The boundaries between virtual and geographic spaces have grown increasingly blurred following the advent of Web 2.0. The embodiment of online spaces breaks down binaries between private and public, physical and imaginary. As these binaries collapse, the separation between virtual diasporas and displaced communities offline becomes increasingly arbitrary. While earlier studies of virtual diasporas have conceptualized these spaces as parallel to their geographic counterparts, changing definitions of diaspora from a synonym for displaced communities to a set of practices necessitates a reevaluation of these spaces. Online spaces not only provide insight into the nature of diasporic

communities offline, they also encourage diasporic practices to flourish as a result of their own permeable borders.

This chapter conceptualizes the Iranian Vines Facebook page as a space where members of the Iranian community outside of Iran negotiate the boundaries of Iranian authenticity by negotiating the boundaries of the online space itself. By looking at the relationship between the structure of the page and the exchange of symbolic power and by examining the uses of physical space on this page, this chapter investigates how the Iranian Vines page, as a space, shapes the performances and interactions that take place there. What does the space itself tell us about the use of Persian and English as marketplaces and the exchange of power between individuals through language? How do members of the Iranian Vines page use domestic spaces to reterritorialize Iranian identity in ways that challenge ideologies of Iranian authenticity?

My analysis shows that the structure of the space encourages and enhances stancetaking practices through which members negotiate power relations. The use of multimedia on the site also allows Iranians to insert physical spaces into a virtual space, and gives viewers the opportunity to negotiate their relationship with these spaces—for instance in a vine that features footage from

Iran, or vines that show Los Angeles. The Iranian Vines page functions as a linguistic landscape where Iranians not only use different languages (English, Persian script, Romanized Persian) to negotiate their relationship with Iranian identity, they also use language symbolically to claim ownership over the virtual space. Lastly, my analysis shows that Iranians reterritorialize Iranian identity by incorporating physical spaces into their performances in such a way that defines these spaces as sites of identity negotiation.

Iranian Vines as a Virtual Diaspora

The concept of virtual diasporas, online gathering places for members of displaced communities has emerged over the past decade in scholarship on transnationalism.[38] The advent of Web 2.0 has significantly changed the structure and function of these spaces. The rise of social networking and user-generated content sites has equipped internet users with new tools for formulating their cultural identities online through language and performance. The concept of the internet as a harmonious global village has given way to a vision of online social networks as a site of struggle between existing top-down power structures and new bottom-up attempts to disrupt them.

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[38] See, for example, Androutsopolos (2006); Bernal (2006); Ranganathan (2009); Hu (2010); Miyase (2011).

Much of the early scholarship focusing on online diasporas emphasized their use for community-building, for the exchange of practical information and for engaging in conversations about that group's relationship to host and home countries. In general, this early scholarship overemphasized the use of the internet as a vehicle for transcend physical and geographical barriers and, by extension, sociopolitical ones, through the exchange of information and knowledge. Appadurai (1996), for instance, examines the use of online diasporic spaces as a vehicle for displaced communities to envision themselves as part of an imagined network of linked individuals, despite their geographical distance.[39] Elkins (1997) and Mallapragada (2000) also discuss the use of the internet by members of diaspora seeking to fulfill sociocultural needs. While social networking and user-generated content sites have increasingly become articulated as transnational, transcultural spaces where individuals interact across geographical, linguistic and cultural lines, the underlying ambiguity surrounding their ownership leads to tensions that create fissures in the utopic image of the internet as global village. While sites such as Facebook, YouTube

[39] Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996.

and Twitter, originated in the U.S., with English as the dominant language of their content, they are now ubiquitous in other countries. Whereas the virtual diaspora once existed on its own in a message board disconnected from other networks, the virtual diaspora at the center of this study exist within a larger social network. The location of the virtual diaspora within this larger network complicates the relationship between the members of the community and the space they occupy. On the one hand, the predominant use of English on Facebook suggests the page exists in a marketplace that values English over Persian. On the other hand, the centrality of inside jokes and ingroup solidarity creates a boundary between the page and the rest of Facebook. By using the Persian language throughout the site, including performances and comments, and by circulating ideologies of linguistic purism that value Persian over English, the users of the site create tension between English-dominant Facebook and a sociolinguistic hierarchy that values native speaker Persian. The tension between these two hierarchies leads to contestation between members as they struggle to claim ownership over the deterritorialized space.

While the study of technology by Iranian youth encompasses blogging, Twitter, Facebook and mobile phone technologies,[40] scholarship focusing on digital technology in the Iranian diaspora has largely centered on the blogosphere, which encompasses both the network of Persian language blogs written by Iranians in Iran as well as blogs by diaspora Iranians who prefer to write in English. Alinejad (2011) finds that Iranian American youth use blogging to incorporate specific places in their city into the narrative of Iranian diaspora cultural identity. She argues that within the space of the blog, "the material body plays an important role in creating strong emotional reactions and sensory memories associated with these transnational diaspora identifications…home is still associated with physical spaces, however, and is not a psychic condition attained through online communications."[41] According to Alinejad's study, the internet does not allow members of the diaspora to transcend their ties to

[40] See Ketabchi, Asadpour & Tabatabaei (2013) and Harai & Darani (2010) for discussions about Iranians on Twitter and analyses of the social networking site's role in the 2009 Iranian elections and its subsequent uprisings. For a discussion of mobile phone communication among Iranian youth, see Niknam (2010). For discussions on Iranians using Facebook, see Heivadi & Khajeheian (2013), KhosraviNik & Zia (2014) and Moradabadi, Gharehshiran & Amrai (2012).

[41] Alinejad, Donya. 2011. "Mapping homelands through virtual spaces: transnational embodiment and Iranian diaspora bloggers." *Global Networks* 11(1): 52.

physical locations or national boundaries. Rather, the internet “not only replicates nation-state boundaries but may even increase their importance.”[42]

Sreberny & Khiabany (2010), too, discuss the importance of Iranian cosmopolitanism and diaspora experiences to the rapid growth and prominence of the Iranian blogosphere. Their work finds that the lack of “critical mass in face-to-face reality” has led to the dwindling of blogs by many Iranians outside of Iran who use blogging to actively engage with the sociopolitical climate of their home country. This finding further supports the notion that physical and virtual spaces engage in a complex interplay. Sreberny & Khiabany and Alinejad’s work challenge the deterritorialization of online spaces by arguing that bloggers actively incorporate physical spaces into their online narratives, bridging the gap between geography and the imagined community.

The linguistic borders between the Iranian American and Iranian blogospheres intensifies the bloggers’ need to incorporate actual geographic locations into online spaces. Alinejad’s study finds bloggers raised outside of Iran and less comfortable in Persian than their native Iranian counterparts experienced a sense of alienation from the Persian blogosphere. Spending time in

[42] Alinejad, 45

Iran and narrating their travels via blogs becomes a way for some bloggers to stake their claim as authentic Iranians even when writing primarily in English. Travel to Iran, then, becomes a means for these bloggers to overcome this alienation and the divisions within the Iranian diaspora community.

The prevalence of language policing and the mocking of nonstandard forms of Persian on the page reflects the internal divisions in the community Alinejad references. Contentions also emerge through critiques of stereotypical traits associated with Iranians: the superficiality of Los Angeles Iranians, for instance, or the disingenuousness of Iranian women who adopt western standards of beauty. By critiquing characterizations of the Iranian community as a whole, users of the site act as gatekeepers of Iranian identity, negotiating the boundaries of its collective construction within this space. The effectiveness of Iranian Vines as a transnational communal space stems in part from its accessibility to a wide demographic. Unlike the blogosphere, where a division exists between Persian blogs by Iranians living in Iran and English-language blogs written by Iranians, the Iranian Vines page grants access to Iranians with varying degrees of Persian fluency. Non English-speaking Iranians in Europe

also participate on the site, writing comments in such languages as German, French and Swedish.

The page's location on Facebook situates the space within an existing network with its own pre-packaged sociolinguistic hierarchies, further complicating the power dynamics between its members. Even though the use of Persian and the ingroup orientation of the performances renders the site inaccessible to outsiders, the semi-public nature of Facebook prompts some viewers to see the page as a representation of Iranians subject to evaluation by a global audience. Comments urging performers not to embarrass the community perpetuate the notion of a global audience even in the absence of significant evidence suggesting that non-Iranians view the performances posted on the page:

> -Come on, Admin, you shouldn't put vines by everyone on here, you're destroying our reputation
>
> -It's interesting that none of these Iranians who make vines know how to speak Persian. They've ruined our reputation.
>
> -What you guys are doing is just making every one look bad! This is not who we are! People all around the world already judge us based on the BS others have said! Us, Persians, we shouldn't make it worst than what it already is!

Such comments create a narrative of this space as public rather private, as accessible to global audiences rather than restricted to Persian-speaking Iranians. The comments use the imagined audience as a rhetorical device to inform performers about what should be considered appropriate or inappropriate in a performance of Iranian identity. The imagined audience functions as a face-saving device that distances the shame from the commenter, deferring it instead onto an imagined community of onlookers. By invoking shame and reputation, these commenters position themselves as gatekeepers of acceptable performances of identity, rejecting some narratives while accepting others. At the same time, such comments suggest that the purpose of vines should be to create authentic representations of Iranians that function as counternarratives to the negative stereotypes that circulate in the mainstream U.S. media. The sharing of vines by individual members of the group with their own private social networks creates a migration across the borders of the page into networks consisting of non-Iranian members. This instability strengthens the notion of the page as subject to an outsider's gaze, which in turn allows members to critique the performances which evoke essentializing stereotypes of Iranian ethnicity without necessarily sacrificing ingroup solidarity.

Stancetaking Practices

The comments above exemplify the ways in which commenters align or disalign their views with a vine or another comment through the practice of stancetaking. Stance refers to how speakers position themselves in relation to their own speech and in relation to other people's speech. [43] Dubois defines stance as "a linguistically articulated form of social action whose meaning is to be construed within the broader scope of language, interaction, and sociocultural value."[44] Scholars of computer-mediated discourse have used stance as a central concept to identify how people position themselves in relation to one another in online interactions.[45] Social networking sites such as Facebook contain an arsenal of tools speakers use to align or disalign themselves with other users on the site. This isn't to ascribe uniqueness to Facebook or similar social networking sites. Rather, tools such as "like" buttons, comments sections, sharing buttons, and tagging function to highlight the stance-rich nature of Facebook as a discursive

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[43] Thurlow, Crispin and Mrcozek, Kristine (eds). *Digital Discourse: Language in the New Media.* Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[44] Dubois, John (2007). The stance triangle. In Robert Englebretson (ed.), Stancetaking in discourse, 139– 82. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

[45] See Walton, S. and Jaffe, A. (2011) and Thurlow, C. and Jaworski, A. (2011) in Thurlow, Crispin and Mrcozek, Kristine (eds). *Digital Discourse: Language in the New Media.* Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

space and the importance of stancetaking to the interactions that take place on the site. While speakers draw from stancetaking tools in everyday offline interaction to position themselves and negotiate their identities in interaction, the buttons and structures of Facebook make visible the processes by which speakers align with and/or disalign themselves from what other people say. The presence of such stancetaking tools also facilitates metalinguistic conversations about members' own stance taking practices as well as those of others with whom they interact. By replying to or liking a comment, for instance, users align or disalign their views with those of other commenters. The reply button allows commenters to respond to another's stance directly and in nuanced ways. The like button, meanwhile, offers users a means of approving or disapproving of a stance, revealing to other users which stances gained the most support. The potential to earn capital through positive evaluations motivates commenters to pay attention not only to the content of their comments, but to their form as well. Witty, pithy remarks, in particular, earned the commenter sociolinguistic capital through likes and positive replies.

Stancetaking practices are mediated by sociocultural frames that determine their consequences. Taking a stance is necessarily an act of evaluation

by which individuals position themselves in relation to another person's speech. As such, stancetaking invites another act of evaluation in response, resulting in a dialogic process by which acts of stancetaking stem from and lead to other acts of stancetaking.[46] The stancetaking processes examined here operate as part of a larger set of dialogic practices whereby participants negotiate their identities and engage with ideologies of authenticity. Stylization and stancetaking as they are closely intertwined practices. Coupland defines stylization as "the knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking context"[47] Through stylization, which draws on Bakhtin's idea of the multivocality of speech,[48] speakers use voice to convey identities in a given communicative context. The concept of stylization has been increasingly used in recent sociolinguistic studies of multilingualism to examine microlevel constructions of social identities in interaction as well as speakers' resistance to macrolevel linkages between language and social identity. Scholars like Jaffe (2009) and

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[46] Dubois, John. "The Stance Triangle" in Englebretson, Robert (ed.) *Stancetaking in discourse: subjectivity, evaluation, interaction*. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub., 2007)

[47] Coupland, Nikolas. 2001. "Dialect Stylization in radio talk." *Language in Society* 30(3): 245

[48] Higgins, Christina. "Insults or Acts of Identity? The role of stylization in multilingual discourse." *Multilingua* 34.2 (2015): 136.

Higgins (2015) have studied stylization and its connection to stancetaking in interaction in order to expand the sociolinguistic understanding of multilingualism. Chun (2004) examines stylization in the form of mocking to show how an Asian American YouTube star uses African American Vernacular English to racialize Asian masculinities and elsewhere (Chun 2009) explores the uses of double-voicing by comedian Margaret Cho to reframe mock stylization of stereotypical Asian speech in order to push back against racist stereotyping. Mason Carris (2011) demonstrates that multilingual stylization doesn't only occur in instances where the speaker's dominant language is also dominant in the sociolinguistic order. She shows how Spanish speakers use mock stylization of an American woman's use of Spanish to challenge the sociolinguistic ordering of mainstream English in relation to Spanish.

The heteroglossic nature of the Iranian Vines Facebook page complicates the function of stylizations used to disrupt the existing sociolinguistic ordering of one language in relation to an other (English in relation to Persian, in this case). Stylizations used by native speakers on the Iranian Vines page to mock Persian used by heritage speakers functions at once to disrupt the dominant sociolinguistic order which places the native English speakers on a hierarchy

above native Persian speakers in the context of Facebook and to reinforce a purist ideology in a space that otherwise supports a spectrum of ethnolinguistic identities and stances toward the English and Persian languages.

Within the context of a virtual diaspora community, stylization plays an important role in interactions between different types of multilingual speakers. Stylization provides multilinguals "with a means of displaying stances, navigating tensions, and positioning themselves and others"[49] In the vines studied for this project, stylization played an important role as a tool for creating humor and for negotiating cultural identities. Central to the practice of stylization is the concept of authenticity. By offering exaggerated versions of another's speech either through mocking or reporting, speakers make meanings pertaining to their perceived authenticity of another's use of speech. In the context of Iranian Vines, stylizations (both spoken and written) of others' speech by different types of Persian speakers both called into question the notions of authentic Iranian identity associated with nationalist ideologies and at the same time reinforced them. The use of stylization, including mocking of both English-dominant Persian speakers and Persian-dominant English speakers, revealed

[49] Ibid., 136.

both the dominance of nationalist/purist ideologies that question the legitimacy of certain speakers' language use (and by extension their cultural belonging) and the bottom up processes by which speakers challenge the dominance of these ideologies.

While individuals identified as heritage speakers style the "other" to express their own identities and position their own subjectivity within this space, the native speaker commenters use stylized mocking that focuses on language use and accent to position heritage speakers as other. Examining the relationship between stylization and stancetaking in the commentary accompanying specific vines reveals the mechanics by which speakers introduce and reinforce a language purist ideology in this space. In other instances, stylized mocking became a means for Persian-dominant English speakers to exhibit resistance to a hierarchy that privileges non-accented English ahead of English spoken in a Persian accent. This hierarchy, while rarely directly articulated on the site, informed the metalinguistic conversations and many of the interactions between native and heritage speakers of Persian. For Jaffe, stylization always constitutes a form of stancetaking; stylized language positions the speaker in relation to the language spoken and the speaker who reports the original speech or evokes a

given voice.[50]

Performances that feature stylized English in a mock Persian accent for instance, or Persian in a mock American accent, also have ideological underpinnings. The ideological agendas of these performances encourage viewers to either align or disalign their own views on language and identity with that of the performer. The interrelationship between the built-in tools offered by Facebook and the ideological stances of the performances themselves suggests that the space doesn't merely function as a static backdrop. Rather, the structure of the site gives shape to the way members negotiate their relationship with Iranian identity amongst themselves, making visible the boundaries of Iranian authenticity that might not be visible offline. By bringing these boundaries into view, the space makes it possible for members to either challenge or renegotiate these boundaries, creating a multiplicity of narratives about Iranian identity that members of the site can collectively reject or accept. The structure of the vines page and its main function—a place where members of the Iranian community

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[50] Jaffe, Alexandra. "Introduction: The sociolinguistics of stance" in Jaffe, Alexandra (ed.). *Stance: Sociolinguistic perspectives*, 3–28. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

create ingroup solidarity through inside jokes—encourages stancetaking by offering users a wide variety of ways to express their stances.

Facebook pages function similarly to a personal profile. A moderator selects vines from emails sent by members of the community and posts them on the “wall” of the page, much like the wall of a profile. Facebook offers a feature whereby the moderator of a group page can opt to deny permission to the members of the group to post material freely. In addition to posting vines, the moderator also participates by posting a profile picture and a cover photo for the page, posting other photos, commenting in response to vines or other comments and deleting comments deemed inappropriate. While the presence of a moderator gives the impression of top-down control, she doesn’t post her own vines or have control over the content generated. Additionally, members occasionally push back by critiquing her choices in the comments section.

The stance richness of the page stems both from Facebook’s built-in system of evaluation and from the use of comedic performance as a way to build ingroup solidarity. The structure of the page encourages stancetaking practices through like and share buttons, comments sections (along with replies that respond directly to comments), and tagging. All comments, including replies can

be evaluated through the like button. The default setting for posts on the page places the comments which receive the highest number of likes at the top of the comments section, while comments that receive fewer likes appear at the bottom. This system creates a visual hierarchy in which all the members of the group participate by "voting" on a particular comment or choosing to ignore others. The users of the page, rather than its moderator, have control over the visual organization of the comments section.

This hierarchical system not only encourages users to express their stances in relation to a vine or another comment, but do so in such a way that other users will align with them. The use of share buttons and tagging (typing another person's name into the comments section, which brings the vine to that person's attention) meanwhile, allows users to take a positive stance toward a vine without directly communicating with the vine creator. Sharing a vine and tagging other Facebook users also allows users of the site to share the vine with their own personal social network, regardless of whether their friends have subscribed to the site. This practice makes permeable the borders between the self-contained page and users' individual networks of friends. The number of

different stancetaking tools available to users makes visible a broad range of stance taking practices available to people in offline contexts.

The tools provided by Facebook's built-in system of evaluation enhance the stancetaking practices with which people respond to comedic performances. Performance frames encourage audiences to regard the language used by a performer with special scrutiny, therefore prompting the audience to take a stance in response to the performer. Stancetaking practices also influence the content of other performances. In the vine, "Haters," for instance, the performer disaligns with the negative stancetaking of first-generation Iranians who mock disparaging comments, by framing their negativity as emblematic of their jealousy toward the vine performer's creativity.

Example 1.1: Haters

[Scene opens with a shot of a computer screen showing the Iranian Vines page. A vine is playing on the screen.]

1 Moteram: *Ajab vaine bahali bud* What a cool vine.

2 Moteram: *Chera be fekre man naresid? Ah!* Why didn't I think of it? Damn!

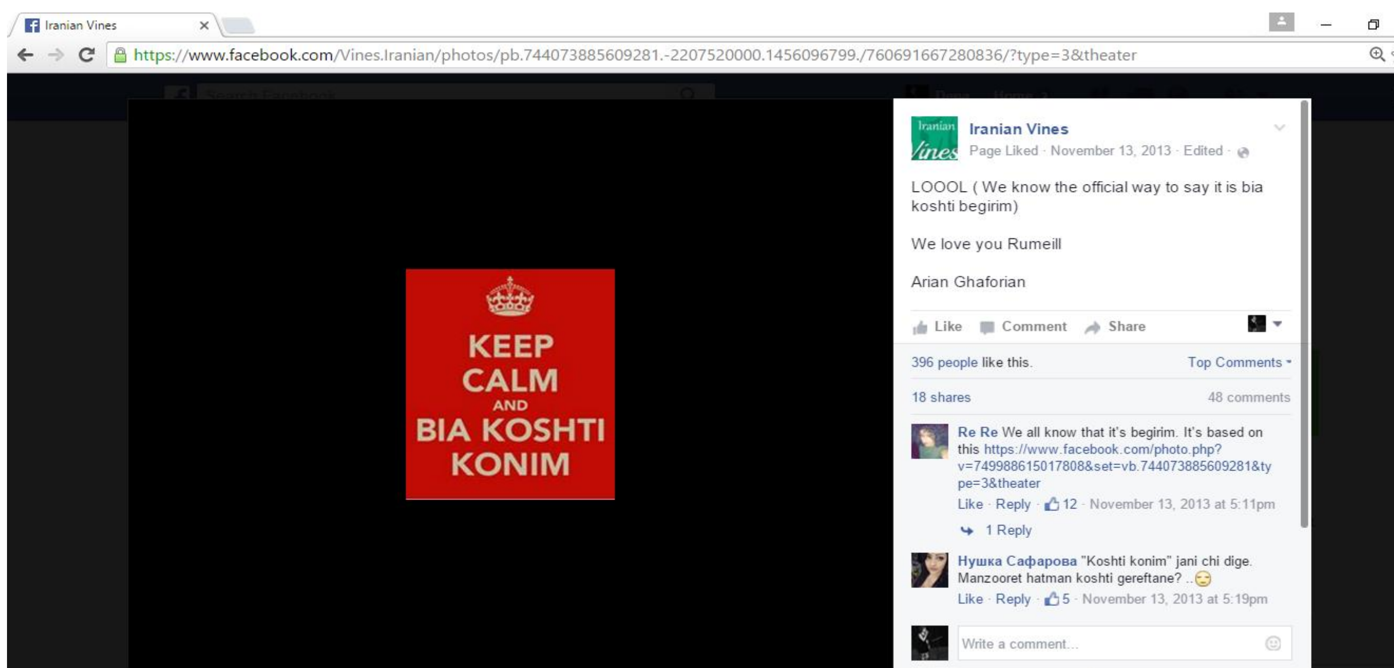
[Camera zooms in]

3 Moteram: [Typing into the comments] *Ajab vaine bimazeyi bud* What a dumb vine

In this performance, the same speaker expresses opposite views on one of the vines posted on the site, one that represents his private opinion and one that represents a performance of envy disguised as hostility. By portraying a viewer who, in private, praises the vine and wishes he had thought of the idea yet whose public comments express criticism, the performer reads negative comments as performances of a secret envy by members of the community who lack the necessary creativity to come up with ideas, themselves. By changing his voice to a nasal, cartoonish whine when typing the negative comment, the speaker frames the comment as an incongruous performance that contrasts his authentic opinion of the vine. The use of performance to critique the negative stancetaking of other viewers underlines the performative nature of the comments section itself. By literally performing a comment that masks the commenter's actual authentic stance toward the vine, the creator of this vine suggests that viewers who criticize others' vines are inauthentic.

Iranian Vines as a Linguistic Landscape

Fig. 1.1



Framing the Iranian Vines page as a linguistic landscape makes visible another layer of power relations between native and heritage speakers. The term Linguistic Landscape originally referred to the analysis of language used in signage within geographic locales, particularly in places where signs and street names reflect the balance of power between languages spoken by local inhabitants. Sociolinguists interested in linguistic landscapes study the use of language in signs, street names, store fronts through quantitative analysis in order to determine the linguistic power dynamics of particular geographic areas. More recently, the concept of linguistic landscapes has been applied to the study

of online spaces. Heyd (2014), for example, studies the use of folk linguistic landscapes, websites where non-linguists mock nonstandard usages on street and store signs through photos. Heyd refers to these photos of nonstandard English as folk linguistic landscapes because they very closely resemble photos of signage and other forms of public written language that sociolinguists take to study these uses of language offline. She argues that these sites perpetuate linguistic normativism by highlighting nonstandard usages of English language and grammar through mocking. By looking at the stancetaking practices of photo bloggers who mock nonstandard language use, Heyd argues that language policing occurs not only through top-down processes but through what she refers to as grassroots prescriptivism, bottom-up processes (e.g. language policing, linguistic gatekeeping, enregisterment, sanctioning) by which individuals police others' nonstandard language use in the context of everyday interactions. The persistent, interactive nature of computer-mediated communication makes these processes particularly pronounced in online spaces.[51]

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[51] Heyd, Theresa. (2014). "Folk-Linguistic Landscapes: The Visual Semiotics of Digital Enregisterment." *Language in Society* 43 (489-514).

Analyzing the Iranian Vines page as a virtual linguistic landscape provides an additional layer of understanding regarding the exchange of symbolic power among users. While individuals take a variety of stances in relation to ideologies of language and authenticity, the use of language on the site as a whole provides insight into the stance of the space itself. Using an image of a speech act to mock its nonstandard usage complicates the exchange of power between the mocker and the speaker. The image simultaneously challenges the legitimacy of a usage and draws special attention to the performer, granting him social capital in the context of the site. The most glaring example of using linguistic landscape to police language through enregisterment occurs when the moderator posted a graphic of the Keep Calm meme with the non-standard usage of the Persian word for *to wrestle*. The meme refers to the vine "*Pedar Bia Koshti Konim (*Dad, Let's Wrestle)," in which the second-generation performer uses a nonstandard term for wrestling that leads to an onslaught of mocking and revoicings by first-generation Iranians. The graphic reflects the complexity of language politics on this site. Mocking the nonstandard usage functions as a form of language policing. The use of the "Keep Calm" meme, on the other hand, supports the nonstandard usage by mocking those who reacted with negative

comments and also promotes the use of code-switching to create humor. By recontextualizing the nonstandard usage and using it in an image, the moderator parallels the work of photo bloggers who take pictures of nonstandard usage and display them on their sites for comedic effect. This parallel reinforces the breakdown of the physical and the virtual. The graphic functions similarly to a sign found in a physical landscape, the main difference being the clever, performative way in which the moderator reframes the nonstandard usage to create humor and to strengthen ingroup solidarity with a visual inside joke only accessible to followers of the page.

Figure 1.2

The layout of languages in the profile picture and cover photo used on the site reflects the top-down processes that influence the exchange of symbolic power on the Iranian Vines page. By using an English title for the space, the moderator suggests that English dominates the page. The use of the word Persian in Persian (فارسی) in both images highlights the importance of the language to the space while also defining the page as bilingual. In both images, however, the word for Persian appears either below the English words or as a silhouette, reinforcing the idea of Persian as present but subordinate to English. At the same time, while Persian appears in smaller letters under the larger English words Iranian Vines in the cover photo, it looms larger than the English words in the background of the profile photo, the photo that corresponds with a portrait in personal profiles, a primary expression of one's identity. These arrangements parallel the literal positioning of heritage Persian speakers in relation to native speakers in the majority of vines. The vines, most of which are made by second-generation participants, take up more space than the comments, unless the viewer manually expands them, yet the content of the comments and the language ideologies they circulate provide a powerful backdrop for the performances and conversations about identity that take place on the page.

Reterritorializing Iranian Identity through Domestic Spaces

By incorporating footage of their homes and cars into the landscape of the Iranian Vines page, performers legitimize these otherwise diasporic spaces as Iranian and at the same time break down barriers between physical and virtual space. By using domestic spaces as a backdrop for performances posted on the Iranian Vines page, users of the site reterritorialize Iranian identity by defining physical spaces outside of Iran as Iranian. Whereas Iranian bloggers in diaspora incorporate narratives of their travels to Iran to gain legitimacy,[52] performers on the Iranians Vines page lend legitimacy to diasporic spaces by using them as a backdrop to narratives of Iranian identity. The use of private domestic spaces within a semi-public online setting further complicates the blurred boundaries between public and private. Second-generation Iranians typically engage with Iranian culture in the home, rather than in the public sphere. Bringing domestic space into the Iranian Vines space suggests that these two spaces have similar functions for the identity work that takes place there. The use of interior spaces also underlines the ingroup solidarity of the “inside joke.”

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[52] Alinejad, Donya.“Mapping homelands through virtual spaces: transnational embodiment and Iranian diaspora bloggers.” *Global Networks* 11.1(2011): 59.

Of the 267 vines posted on the page between October 2013 and April 2014, 181 (67%) take place inside the home, 16 (5%) take place in cars and the remainder take places in various public places: restaurants, streets, movie theaters and stores. The prevalence of vines taking place in the home highlights the importance of these domestic spaces to narratives of Iranian diasporic identity. Rather than provide an arbitrary or static setting, these spaces often play a significant role in the narrative of cultural collisions. Since many of the performances center around sociopragmatic differences between cultures, the domestic space allows performers to bring their perspective as outgroup members to the private Iranian sphere.

Some vines use domestic spaces to comment on the ways in which Iranians and non-Iranians relate to their homes. These vines further reinforce ingroup solidarity, both by literally inviting viewers into performers' homes and by creating humor through the incongruity of Iranian and non-Iranian behavior in the domestic space, an incongruity that requires both intimate knowledge of these spaces and the ability to align with the outgroup perspective.

Example 1.2: How Others Knock vs. How Persians Knock

[Vine opens with a scene of a young woman standing in a living room. The camera is tilted so that she appears sideways]

1 Shana: How white people knock

2 [Cut to an identical shot] Shana: [knocks lightly on door] Sweetie, open the door

3 [Cut to an identical shot] Shana: how Persian people knock

4 Shana: [banging loudly on the door with an angry expression on her face]

Kesafat daro baz kon bebinam chekar mikoni goh! *Open the door you shit, what the fuck are you doing?*

The contrast between the polite knocking of the first persona and the profanity used by the second aligns with other narratives that circulate stereotypes of non-Iranians (typically white North Americans) as polite and diffident in contrast to abrasive, aggressive Iranian behaviors. This vine also mocks the differences between what Iranians and non-Iranians consider private versus public spaces. The humor yielded by this vine comes from the understanding that closing the door within an Iranian household elicits an indignant response because it goes against Iranian ideas of what constitutes a private space. Whereas the non-Iranian parent reacts to the closed door with a

polite request, the Iranian parent responds as if the closed door implies her child has something to hide. The portrayal of the Iranian parent's response suggests an incongruity between parental expectations of private space and those of their children.

Of the vines that take place in cars, 37% focus on the performer's engagement with Iranian music, suggesting that this private space gives the performer the freedom to move from one identity to the other using popular culture as a tool. Many of the commenters make remarks confirming that they too behave similarly in the private space of their car:

The vine "Persians in Public versus Persians in Private," uses music to address the private/public dichotomy which allocates private spaces to Iranian identity and public spaces to a performance of mainstream American identity. The vine suggests that the performers adhere to conventional, western standards of masculinity when appearing in public, whereas they prefer to express a stereotypically flamboyant Middle Eastern masculinity in private. Despite the juxtaposition of private and public, the physical space shown in both shots doesn't change. In both segments, the performers sit inside a dark vehicle which appears to be in a garage, implying that the performance renders the space

private or public rather than the other way around. This vine and other vines that take place in a vehicle parallel the vines page itself. A vehicle, while sealing the driver off from public space, also possesses permeable borders. The windows expose the driver and passengers to other people on the road. Doors can easily open to the streets. People can be let into the car or let out of it. But while the vehicle in each vine is technically grounded within the boundaries of time and space, the use of music and the movement of bodies becomes a way to create a transnational space within the vehicle. The vehicle, just like the vines page, becomes a heteroglossic space, one where disparate masculinities and cultural identities co-exist. These vehicles parallel the public/private dichotomy of Iranian Vines, itself. Both spaces seal the performers from the wider audience but remain visible to the outside world as well.

Iran as Invisible Backdrop

Despite the implications of its moniker, only one of the vines that appears on the page features actual footage from Iran. The reaction of the viewers to the use of Iranian footage reveals the unmet expectations that many of the participants harbor regarding the relationship between the vines space and Iran as a physical locale. While the vine received only 60 comments, the top comment

received 237 likes, the highest number received by any of the comments on the page:

-Shit, someone finally does a vine in Iran! Oh my God!!

The excitement conveyed by this comment implies that the viewer has anticipated the presence of actual Iranian landscapes on the site. At the same time, the surprise expressed through "Oh my God!!" suggests that by the time this vine was posted (November 15, 2013), the predominant use of locations in other countries (primarily North America and Europe) as settings for vines had distanced the site from territorial associations with Iran. Other commenters also expressed surprise and enthusiasm regarding the vine's setting, suggesting that Iran carries a great deal of symbolic capital as an imaginary backdrop, despite the fact that no other vine takes place there:

-"Like" only because it takes place in Iran

-You can tell it's Iran because of that pride. Lol.

-Finally someone made a vine in Iran

-Iraaaaaaaaaaaaaaan !!!

The disappointment expressed by the commenters who realize the vine was imported from another site also reveals the expectation that the page display original material produced by the community:

> -Sooo was happy to see that it was made in iran, buuuut went down the drain when I realized it's a copy of the regular vines

That the vine first appeared elsewhere ultimately prevents it from bridging the gap between the space of the page and the physical landscape of Iran, according to the commenters. This suggests that a hierarchy in which the originality of a narrative idea trumps the physical setting of the performance. The overall elation these commenters express at seeing Iranian footage, however, reveals an underlying nostalgia for Iran as a physical space. This nostalgia informs the reception of performances of Iranian identity by viewers who have spent time there. The reactions to this vine are also important in that they define the other spaces as non-Iranian. Even though many of the domestic spaces don't appear marked and could therefore be anywhere, the Iran vine creates another measure of authenticity against which the other vines appear less authentically Iranian.

The shadowy presence of Iran as a landscape within this virtual space embodies what Janet Alexanian refers to as the "unique position of 'facing two

ways at once'"[53] that characterizes Iranian immigration and the transnational cultural productions of displaced Iranian communities. Even more than prior examples in which Iranians have used technology to orient themselves toward multiple locations at once, the space of the Iranian Vines page fosters this positionality. Not only does this space encourage its members to face two ways at once; it also allows them to perform this orientation and demonstrate their awareness of it.

[53] Alexanian, Janet. "Iranian Literary Expression in the Digital Age." *MELUS* 33.2 (2008), 132.

Chapter 4: Mocking Practices and Identity Negotiation

Just as science fiction creates opportunities for imagining alternative social realities that model solutions for social change, vines afford performers access to imaginative renderings of identity.[54] Technological magic tricks enhance the sociolinguistic maneuvering second-generation Persian speakers use in everyday offline interactions to strengthen ingroup solidarity: mocking their parents' accents and creating a space to share cultural inside jokes, code-switching to emphasize the comic contrast between their seemingly incompatible cultural affiliations. The temporal compression of vines transforms this offline performativity into a visual joke whose punchline is the moment of cultural collision. These collisions include such moments as when a mother hands her son a large bag of fruit as he leaves for a study session at a coffee shop, or the strictness of a Iranian mother reacting with violence to a child who talks back. Through costume changes, abrupt cutting, music, props, inserting clips from well-known films or music videos, these performers build micro-narratives that create and underline their sociolinguistic flexibility, that highlight their skilled

[54] Lang, Amy Schrager and Lang, Daniel Rosza. 'Realists of a Larger Reality': On New Science Fiction. *Monthly Review* 67.11 (2016).

performances of multiple identities and voices within a single interaction. Cultural differences that might read as social awkwardness or incompetence in other contexts therefore become a means of earning sociolinguistic capital through humor.

This chapter focuses on two main second-generation mocking practices observed on the Iranian Vines page, identity-switching and metalinguistic mocking, in order to examine how second-generation Iranians use mocking to challenge dominant sociolinguistic hierarchies that place monolingual (or parallel bilingual) and monocultural speakers ahead of dominant bilingual speakers with multiple cultural alliances. My analysis shows that second-generation Iranians use these mocking practices to reposition themselves within hierarchies in the Iranian community that favor the idealized Persian of native speakers, and the ability to retain Iranian cultural traditions while still assimilating into the host culture via professional success. A tension exists on the site between sociolinguistic hierarchies within Iranian culture that value an idealized monolingual or parallel bilingual identity and the dominant sociolinguistic hierarchies that value unmarked U.S. English over Persian. Second-generation Iranians use their sociolinguistic capital as native speakers of

English to reposition their identities ahead of their first-generation counterparts within a space accessible primarily to Persian speakers. In challenging ideologies that position code-switching or other forms of negotiating bicultural identity as marginal, these performers often circulate ideologies of "authentic" Iranians as violent, angry, impolite, overly rigid and dishonest. On the other hand, the play frame of these performances allows viewers to mock and therefore challenge these disparaging stereotypes.

Sociolinguistics of Performance

The study of performance in sociolinguistics encompasses multiple definitions and has focused on a broad range of genres. Much of the work that concerns the sociolinguistics of performance draws from Bauman's study of verbal art. Bauman's work on performance concerns high performance. He defines performance as an act of expression that prompts the audience to evaluate its form as well as its content.[55] While sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropologists who study performance most often focus on speech, performances often consist of other modalities such as dress, gesture and

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[55] Baumann, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1984).

expression, that should be taken into consideration alongside the use of language.[56]

Bauman and Briggs focus in particular on the reflexive, metalinguistic nature of performance. Not only does performance exist within its own frame, consisting of speech acts and other modalities that define the communication as a performance, this frame also invites interpretation of the performer's speech; performance thus underlines the speech act as an object on display and open to evaluation and interpretation by audiences.

Unlike everyday speech acts, then, performative speech acts elicit evaluations of their effectiveness. While these performances likely also carry out a multitude of other functions, including communication, they differ from other types of communicative speech by drawing attention to themselves as speech acts, by lending themselves to decontextualization by the hearer/audience. The idea of performance as specially marked and artful means that the audience expects the performer to demonstrate skill through their performance, including their artful use of speech. The performer is "therefore subjected to an intense

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[56] Bell, Allan & Gibson, Andy "Staging language: An introduction to the sociolinguistics of performance. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15.5(2011).

audience gaze, being assessed in terms of failure and success, the form of performance is more likely to be scrutinized than in routine communicative practice."[57]

While verbal art largely relies on what Bauman terms paralinguistic features (for instance, when an individual uses the words "once upon a time" to signal that she is about to tell a fictional story), different genres of performance feature different ways of "staging" performance. Some studies of performance have focused on "the overt, scheduled identification and elevation (often literally) of one or more people to perform, typically on a stage, or in a stage-like area such as the space in front of a camera or microphone. It normally involves a clearly visible and instantiated distinction between performer and audience."[58]

The reflexive nature of performance stems from a performer's or audience member's awareness of herself as a participant in an interaction, her awareness of the other's attention toward her, and any additional higher-order reflexive awareness that is present in the experience.[59] Regardless of their roles in the

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[57] Bell, Allan & Gibson, Andy (2011) "Staging language: An introduction to the sociolinguistics of performance. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15.5 (2011), 568.

[58] Ibid., 568.

[59] Berger, Harris. "Bauman's 'Verbal Art' and the Social Organization of Attention: The Role of Reflexivity in the Aesthetics of Performance." *Journal of American Folklore* 115.455 (2002), 77.

interaction, therefore, the participants in a performance always maintain an awareness of themselves as either performing in or observing and evaluating the performance event. This awareness shapes their experience of the event and also informs the performer's experience.

Performance and Frames

The concept of discursive frames by Bateson and later adopted and expanded by Erving Goffman in his work *Frame Analysis*. Their work informs the majority of contemporary linguistic scholarship on the use of frames in interaction. Bateson defined frames as “a defined interpretative context providing guidelines for discriminating between orders of message.” Goffman builds on this understanding, analyzing interaction with the assumption that people interpret situations “in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them.”[60]

For Bateson, interaction can be thought of as occurring on three different levels at once: the denotative or referential, metalinguistic and metacommunicative levels. The notion of frames pertains to the

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[60] Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis*: an essay on the organization of experience. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 10.

metacommunicative dimension of interaction, consisting of signals and messages that serve to guide participants toward a plausible interpretation of a given communication. The cultural specificity of these meta-communicative messages means that two or more participants from different cultures might interpret these meta-communicative signals and messages differently and thus arrive at an interpretation other than what one or more speakers intended.

The understanding of frames and of their role draws attention to the collaborative nature of meaning-making through communication and the processes by which people work toward a shared interpretation of an interaction or derive disparate understandings of what is going on in a given interaction. For studies of cross-cultural communication, an understanding of discursive frames and how they influence interaction can help illuminate how individuals interpret an interaction when they lack the pragmatic knowledge for understanding the expectations of another speaker's interpretive frame.

According to Bauman, performances always rely on discursive frames that cue participants to interpret the event as a performance.[61] These performance frames may or may not be elaborate and participants may relegate them to the

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[61] Baumann, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1984).

background of the event or take them for granted, but framing transforms the language that follows into performance regardless of audience interpretation. Bauman identifies performance frames as consisting of paralinguistic features that key the performance for the audience. These features vary according to the conventions of the communities within which performances take place. Even within a single community, the means by which speakers or performers key their performances may vary according to the genre of performance.

For Bauman, one of the defining features of performance frames is the invitation it extends to the audience to regard the speech act with and scrutiny, evaluating the speech for both its communicative function and for the success of its form. The performance frame signals participants to regard speech as both an act of communication and a decontextualized object subject to evaluation. The paralinguistic, meta-communicative messages delivered by the performer mark the speech act as intended for entertainment and pleasure in addition to communication. These frames give audiences a heightened awareness of language that calls on them to evaluate its effectiveness as verbal art.

Identity-Switching

Of the 267 vines posted on the Iranian Vines Facebook page between October 2013 and April 2014, 32 of them consist of some version of what I call identity-switching, a mocking practice that occurs when the same performer plays two personas featured back to back through abrupt cutting to create the illusion of a rapid transformation from one identity to the other. In the majority of cases, vines creators chronologically place the performance of the non-Iranian personality before the Iranian one, so that the Iranian's behavior becomes the punchline. This sequential placement both reinforces othering stereotypes of Iranians and enhances ingroup solidarity through an inside joke. Many of these vines actually feature three personas all performed by the same person: the unmarked persona of the vines creator who usually speaks in English with an American accent, followed by stylized performances of a non-Iranian and an Iranian. In a few of the vines, the performer appears as him or herself then switches into an Iranian identity, strengthening ingroup solidarity without referencing the outgroup. In the majority of identity-switching vines, the performer mocks a first-generation Iranian, usually a parent, aunt or uncle or grandparent and signals the shift in identity by speaking Persian or by speaking English in a thick Persian accent, similar to what Chun calls "Mock Asian" in her

study of Margaret Cho's work.[62] A few of the vines don't distinguish first- or second generation Iranians, leaving the viewer to interpret the performance as either.

While second-generation Iranians made the majority of identity-switching vines on the site, first-generation Iranians sometimes adapted the structure to comment on problems of inauthenticity among their peers or to position their own identities against that of Iranians still living in Iran. In one of these vines, "Doostdokhtaret to Iran [Your girlfriend in Iran]," the performer mocks the appearance of an Iranian woman still living in Iran. In another, "Iranian boys," the performer mocks the behavior of first-generation Iranian men, whose attitudes toward their girlfriends change according to the girlfriend's ethnicity. With the non-Iranian girlfriend, the man speaks accented English kindly and politely. With the Iranian girlfriend, the same man speaks in stern Persian, berating her. A third such vine mocks the tendency of Iranians to lose their ability to speak Persian once they leave Iranian, by showing a man who begins speaking Persian with a thick American accent, his speech peppered with

[62] Chun, Elaine. "Ideologies of Legitimate Mockery: Margaret Cho's Revoicings of Mock Asian." *Pragmatics: Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association* 14 (2004).

English words, the moment he steps foot in the LAX airport. These performances use similar structures as identity-switching vines made by second-generation Iranians, but they don't share the same function. Rather than create ingroup solidarity between second-generation or more bicultural Iranians, they create solidarity between young first-generation Iranians. These vines mock what these performers identify as the inherent dishonesty of changing one's identity to appear more westernized, whether living in or outside of Iran. As such, these vines promote an ideology that favors nationalistic identities.

Second-generation identity-switching, meanwhile, allows non-native Persian speakers to reposition code-switching as a demonstration of their sociolinguistic prowess rather than a symbol of second-generation laziness or indifference to their linguistic and cultural heritage. These performers reinterpret "Bad Persian," as a legitimate way of speaking and biculturalism as a legitimate social identity. As such, these performances challenge dominant ideologies favoring Persian monolingual speakers or parallel bilinguals (those with native or near-native proficiency in two languages). By "magically" shifting from one identity to another, second-generation performers become tricksters, traverse cultural and linguistic borders through seemingly effortless maneuvers. The

humor yielded by these transformations grants these speakers access to capital in the form of attention: Facebook likes, comments, pingbacks, and shares. This capital amounts to a kind of fame alluded to by some of the commenters (e.g. "you're famous!). Yet identity-switching shouldn't be seen as a byproduct of technological innovation so much as hyperbolic rendering of what bilingual speakers already do offline. Identity-switching merely makes visible the performativity at work when a second-generation speaker code-switches from one language to another and/or from one performance of identity to another. By making this identity work visible in a space occupied by native Persian speakers as well as other second-generation Iranians, however, these performances become about more than building ingroup solidarity. Rather, the performances directly challenge ideologies of Iranian authenticity that exclude dominant bilinguals (speakers less comfortable in Persian than another language). At the same time, the brevity of performances also gives the speaker the opportunity to present an idealized way of speaking Persian that his or her actual proficiency level might not allow in a longer performance. Identity-switching thus becomes both a way to challenge dominant sociolinguistic hierarchies and to momentarily embody the very parallel bilingualism that such ideologies favor.

Us vs. Us

Identity-switching vines allow performers to hone in on moments of cultural or linguistic difference between Iranians and other ethnic groups in order to locate their perspective between these two communities, filling the online space with performances of this liminality. Decontextualizing such moments and placing them side by side both reveals major differences between the two cultures and renders the differences in behavior absurdly humorous, especially when the same person incongruously performs both personas. Titles such as "How Persians Pick up the Phone Vs. Others," "How Others knock Vs. How Persians knock," and "How Dads say goodnight Vs Persian dads" describe some of the mundane everyday moments that reveal comical differences when juxtaposed by the same performer. This structure on the one hand creates essentializing portrayals of both Iranians and non-Iranians that reinforce existing stereotypes (e.g. Anglo-Americans are especially friendly and have a relaxed parenting style, Iranians have strict parent styles and love water pipes) by indexing a particular behavior to the ethnic group (or a subset) as a whole. On the other hand, exaggerating differences between ingroup and outgroup results at times in tensions between second-generation performers and their young first-

generation Iranian viewers who, out of a desire to assimilate into their new host culture, are forced to align with the outgroup or who might adhere to nationalist ideologies that value the minimizing of differences between Iranian and western cultures.

Example 2.1: Forushande Irooni Vs. Amricai

[The scene begins with Mina standing against dark background, wearing a gray knit cap and looking directly at the camera]

1 North American vendors be like

[Abruptly cut to Mina without the knit cap, wearing what looks like a tape measure around her neck]

2 [In a chipper tone] Hi! Welcome to our store. Just so you know, we have twenty percent off on our shoes today. [Smiles insincerely and tilts her head to the side]

[Abruptly cut to Mina wearing the knit cap from earlier]

3 Persian vendors in Iran be like

[Abruptly cut to a scene featuring Mina wearing a brightly colored plaid headscarf and thick black glasses. The scarf rests away from her forehead,

revealing her hair, which has been combed high into a pouf. She's talking on the phone, presumably with a close friend]

4 *Bebin Mozhgan, man behet gofte budam in pesare* Look, Mojgan, I had told you this

ashghale boy is trash

[Looks to off to the side presumably at the door then back to the phone]

5 *Vaisa bebinam moshtari daram* Hang on a second, I have a customer

6 [Looking at camera, yelling] *Chi Mikhai?!* What do you want?!

By beginning each of the two micro-performances with an introduction that informs the viewer of the social identity she will perform (North American vendors, Iranian vendors), Mina positions herself as a kind of cultural tour guide. Her ability to embody both roles so completely underlines her linguistic and cultural expertise in each habitus, implying she possesses an equal degree of membership to both of the groups whose collective behavior her performance mocks. A tension exists between this demonstration of membership and the implication, through the presence of the host persona, that Mina's authentic identity exists somewhere between these two cultural performances. Stylization

in the form of pitch, tone, and rhythmicality to produce exaggerated sweetness as the North American vendor and self-centered irritation as the Iranian vendor places special emphasis on these identities, marking their differentiation from the host. The unmarked speech of the host, meanwhile, encourages the viewer to align with her subject position. The host's unmarked style here signals the audience to equate the persona with the comedian's actual identity.

Not only does the host persona embody a third space,[63] a performance of identity that can neither be characterized as Iranian nor North American, the vine itself acts as a fourth space, a space that holds all three identities at the same time, revealing Mina's awareness of them. While third space enables the second-generation immigrant to negotiate his or her identity, fourth space draws attention to the very performativity of hybridized identity. The frame highlights Mina's skillfulness in negotiating multiple selves. While dominant sociolinguistic ideologies equate code-switching with low Persian proficiency and a lack of Iranian authenticity, the fourth space positions code-switching as a deliberate act of identity.

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[63] Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Not only does Mina's performance exhibit her authority as a member of two ethnolinguistic communities, her concurrent outsider status in both groups allows her to acquire capital within this space by mocking both cultures simultaneously. Through linguistic stylization, gesture and costume Mina demonstrates authority in each culture, an authority that ironically comes from having the necessary cultural distance required to observe these differences as an outsider. Her insider status, on the other hand, allows Mina to use double-voicing to create essentializing portrayals of Iranians and North Americans that might read as socially unacceptable if performed by a true outsider. The overwhelmingly positive comments on this vine strengthen Mina's authority. As of January 2016, this vine had 2,184 likes, 142 shares and 150 comments. Of these comments, 6 were negative, 4 were neutral and 140 were positive, including those that tagged other commenters. Of the positive comments, 37 (25%) affirmed the veracity of the performance (e.g. Exactly! So true, Truth). Of the negative comments, four of them challenged the vine's authenticity:

-*Na baba injooriyam nist daghighan* No way, it's not exactly like this

-*Nababa injoriam nist azizam* No way, it's not like this my dear

-*Naaaaaaaaaaaaaaa injoori nistan hame…*Nooooo not everyone is like this…

> -Horse shit. in fact no where in the world people shop like the Iranians. They are too good and make sure you don't leave without buying even the smallest thing They have in their stores. you went to the wrong store or they probably knew how dumb you were and treated you like shit.

The first three of these negative comments challenge Mina's authority to portray Iranians in Iran by implicit claims to insider knowledge of Iran that carries more weight than Mina's insider/outsider knowledge. These commenters enhance their own sense of authority on Iran by responding in Persian. The hyperbolic statement "in fact nowhere in the world people shop like the Iranians" in the last comment suggests that this commenter views Mina's vine as a threat to nationalist ideologies that assert Iranian superiority through traits like hospitality, politeness, and social sophistication, all of which index cultural refinement. Adherence to such ideologies grants symbolic capital to native Iranians more so than to Iranians who've grown up outside of the country, an imbalance that creates tension between the two groups, as indicated by the hostility expressed toward Mina by the last commenter. The lack of such negative comments in the vine "Doostdokhtaret to Iran (Your Girlfriend in Iran)" which similarly mocks Iranian women in Tehran but from a native Iranian perspective suggests that Mina's ability to portray a North American woman

with equal facility makes her subject to attacks on her authority on Iranian culture.

The success of Mina's vine can in part be attributed to the ideologies her performance circulates about Iranian women of a lower socioeconomic status. By choosing to portray an Iranian vendor in Iran, an identity from which most of the vines viewers most likely have a considerable amount of social distance, Mina M. can also mock characteristics of Iranians and of Iranian women, in particular, without alienating the majority of viewers of her vine. The stereotyping of working-class Iranian women as aggressive, self-involved and bad employees by contrast to North American women as kind and saccharine, but artificially so, is permissible in the vine because the framing of performance as a parody of Iranian and North American Vendors and not of Iranian and North American women, allows viewers to align with the stereotypes without acknowledging that these traits apply to themselves. That the stereotype refers to a member of a relatively lower socioeconomic status allows commenters to also align with a higher socioeconomic status by accepting the performer's stance. That she mocks a woman still living in Iran rather an Iranian living in North American or Europe also reinforces ingroup solidarity between both first and second generation

Iranians by mocking behaviors that can be seen as byproducts of Iran's economic and social realities, rather than cultural traits inherent to Iranians regardless of where they live.

Double-voicing as Authority

The positive responses to identity-switching vines results in large part from the double-voicing employed by second-generation youth imitating first-generation Iranians. The negative responses to vines in which older first-generation Iranians use identity-switching to show the contrast between Iranian and American parenting styles emphasizes the importance of double-voicing as a performative tool.

2.2 Difference Between American and Iranian Moms

[Scene opens with an Iranian woman who appears to be in her fifties working on her laptop computer at the kitchen table]

1 Saba: [off-camera] Mom, I'm going out

2 Mother: [without looking up] Ok

3 Saba: *Maman daram miram birun*	Mom, I'm going out
4 Mother: *qalat mikoni*	Like hell you are

By asking her mother to play the role of the mom, Saba uses a performance frame which makes it possible to mock first-generation Iranians without sacrificing solidarity by mocking them through a performance of her own. The mother's consent to play this identity-switching role implies to the viewer that they can align with this performance without breaking loyalty. While one would expect this vine to result in mostly positive feedback, particularly from first-generation viewers, the commentary actually presents an opposite narrative. On the one hand, the vine received 1, 466 likes, 150 comments and 79 shares as of January 2016, indicating a largely positive response. Rather than unify first and second-generation Iranians, however, the authenticity added by the presence of the first-generation mother leads to a contentious debate among the top commenters:

> -Could you guys just stop with these "Persian vs. American" thing?! cause honestly, not only they're not funny anymore, they're very sad and insulting! this is not the way most of Persian kids are treated! what you guys are doing is just making every one look bad! This is not who we are! people all around the world already judge us based on the BS others have said! Us, Persians, we shouldn't make it worst than what it already is! Again, they're not funny anymore!! So just stop!! (97 likes)

> -Actually this is based on Persian stereo types constructed by mass culture of how parents still react even after leaving Iran with the same behavior they were raised in a different country. I say let the games go on, I find

them really funny, and if you are afraid of being judged or seen as a stereo type [sic], well I have to say people that judge other people by stereo types [sic] are usually racist and dumb f**ks.

-Why are you so mad? Its [sic] just a joke theres no need to take it so seriously you're like what? 18 relax

The first two comments reveal the existence of conflicting ideologies surrounding the sociocultural function of Iranian vines. The first commenter, whose Facebook profile information suggests she grew up in Iran but now lives elsewhere, interprets the vine as a performance that reifies existing negative stereotypes of Iranians as violent and uncultured. Curiously, her comment also suggests that vines function as representations of Iranians to an imagined outsider audience, even though the sociolinguistic boundaries of the vines page make the performance inaccessible to non-Persian speakers. The second commenter, whose Facebook profile doesn't indicate whether or not he's a native Persian speaker, reinforces, as Elaine Chun and Emmanuel Da Silva have pointed out, the use of the play frame to reposition existing ethnic stereotypes, disarming them by drawing attention to their absurdity through mocking. As the first comment makes clear, however, the absurdity is less apparent in the absence of double-voicing. The presence of the performer's actual

mother makes this vine *too* authentic, obscuring the performance frame that encourages viewers to read the identity-switching as mocking. The first commenter's negative evaluation exposes a boundary between authenticity and exaggeration that these performances must negotiate in order to persuade the maximum number of viewers to align with their essentializing portrayal. Other comments responding to this vine reinforce the existence of this boundary:

> *-Mamane irani fori nemige ghalat mikoni mige barachi mri koja miri baki miri zod bad az inke motamaen shod mige ki bar migardi ya zod bargard va tabargasht dokhtaresh motazer va negara n mimone*
>
> An Iranian mother doesn't say 'Like Hell you are' right away, she says 'why are you going? Who are you going with? As soon as she knows, she says don't stay out long and until her daughter comes back she waits and worry

The above comment reinterprets the vine's portrayal of strictness or rigidity with a narrative of maternal care and concern underlying the mother's harsh words. This reframing challenges the performers' reading of first-generation behavior, claiming Iranian parents care more deeply for their children's wellbeing than non-Iranian parents. Challenging the performer's interpretation of the mother's behavior, the commenter also positions the overzealous Iranian parenting style

portrayed on this site as an emblem of cultural superiority as opposed to the more relaxed American parenting styles.

This contentious comments for this vine also show the potential for vines to facilitate metalinguistic conversations (discussions about language) in which Iranians dialogically negotiate the meanings of the vines and their portrayal of Iranian culture. These conversations usually stem from a collision between the frame with which the viewer approaches the performance and the frame from which the performer creates the vine. In the above example, Saba uses the vine to highlight the difference between her own restrictive upbringing and that of her peers with American-born parents. By mocking her mother's strictness, the performer also underlines the uniqueness of her own experience and pokes fun at her mother's attitude in such a way that undermines it. By featuring her mother in the performance and by appearing off-camera, Saba allows the viewer to occupy her perspective in a more intimate way than vines that feature performers playing the part of the parent, themselves. By forcing the viewer to assume her perspective, Saba also makes her audience complicit in the mocking of her mother, a first generation Iranian, thus alienating the Iranian viewers who share the mother's first-generation identity and who cannot identify with the

performer's perspective. Some of the vine's other comments, meanwhile, challenge the repetition of Iranians vs. Others vines by questioning their value as entertainment.

> -this whole Iranian vs American thing is getting boring!!! Guys we know there are crazy differences in the two cultures but frankly I don't find the difference that amusing. what happened to some originality?

> -I find it amusing but at the same time, what happened to originality?

Focusing on the aesthetic value of the performances rather than their content allows these commenters to express disappointment with the quality of the vine without sacrificing ingroup solidarity by either challenging or reinforcing the vine's authenticity. The call for originality conflicts with the overarching patterns in this space, where similar themes and tropes repeat over and over and still succeed in gaining capital on the site.

Mock Persian

Drawing on Elaine Chun's analysis of what she calls "Mock Asian," (English spoken in an exaggerated Asian accent) in the performances of Korean-American comedian Margaret Cho,[64] I will turn my analysis to a vine in which

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[64] Chun, Elaine. "Ideologies of Legitimate Mockery: Margaret Cho's Revoicings of Mock Asian." *Pragmatics: Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association* 14 (2004).

the performer uses Mock Persian to challenge the stereotype of native Iranian women as sexually conservative by comparison to non-Iranian women. At the same time, her performance circulates ideologies of young first-generation Iranian women as duplicitous with regard to their sexuality. The Bakhtinian concept of double voicing refers to a type of performance in which a speaker speaks in another's voice. Because of Sahar's insider status, double-voicing here at once allows her to position her identity against native Iranian cultural traits and permits the audience to align with stereotypes invoked by her performance without fear of engaging in discrimination. Identity-switching intensifies the effects of double-voicing by accompanying the change in voice with a change in scene, reinforcing the idea that the performer has transformed into someone else through this performative tactic.

2.3 White Girls Vs. Persian

[Clip opens with a close-up shot of Sahar, who appears on the left side of the screen]

1 Sahar: White girls be like…

2 [Cut to next shot. Sahar now appears on the right side of the screen] Did you sleep with him?

3 [Cut to another shot. Sahar appears on left again] Sahar: Yeah, we like totally had a one night stand.

4 [Cut to shot of Sahar at the center of the screen] Sahar: Persian girls be like…

5 [Cut to another shot of Sahar at the center of the screen, her eyes wide, a slight smile on her lips] Sahar: Did you sleep with him?

6 [Cut to shot of Sahar at center. She grimaces] Sahar [in a thick Persian accent] Oh ma god, I'm a vergen.

7 [Cut to another shot, camera zooms in on Sahar's face] Sahar [whispering] I have *madrak* I have a document

8 [Cut to another shot. Camera zooms in closer so that we can only see Sahar's mouth]

Sahar [whispering]: From the *doktor*

Through the use of code-switching in "I have *madrak*," referring to the documentation that certifies her virginity, Sahar simultaneously mocks this selective insertion of key words in Persian and the very practice of hymen surgery, to which the last section refers. The woman's accent and code-switching indexes the persona of the westernized Iranian American (or Canadian) whose

use of Persian words in English reflects her cultural confusion. Indexing this behavior allows Sahar to distance herself from what she perceives as Iranian disingenuousness, sacrificing ingroup solidarity in order to negotiate her own identity outside of Iranian and white culture. "I have *madrak*" also reifies a popular stereotype of Iranians in Iran circulated by the diaspora Iranian community. Like Mina's vine, "White girls vs Persian girls" uses a third host-like persona in addition to the juxtaposed Iranian and non-Iranian (in this case, white) performances in order to locate Sahar's authentic identity outside of these two cultural groups. Through this host persona, Sahar places emphasis on her ability to locate the junctures where the stereotypical values of these two cultures clash comically. Here, Sahar actually minimizes the difference between Iranian and white women by suggesting Iranian women share a relaxed attitude toward sexuality in contrast to stereotypes of Iranian women as more conservative with regard to sex even after they leave Iran. Rather than locate the comical difference in the women's cultural attitudes, as one might expect from the vine's initial set-up, Sahar locates the true difference between cultures in the women's willingness to speak openly about their sexuality. The humor of this vine thus results simultaneously from the collision between the white woman's openness about

casual sex in contrast to the Iranian woman's faux conservatism and from the discovery, through the whispering at the end, that the two women actually share similar attitudes toward sexuality, at least in the private sphere. The majority of the commentary on this vine reinforces the veracity of Sahar's portrayal of Iranian inauthenticity by revoicing the word *madrak* [document]. Revoicing is never neutral but rather functions as an evaluative speech act. In some cases this evaluation may be negative (as with comments mocking linguistic errors) and in others, it may express alignment and affirmation. As of January 2016, this vine had 1,249 likes, 330 comments and 95 shares. Of the comments, 15 consist of revoicings of the phrase *I have madrak*, highlighting this phrase as the punch line of the joke.

The commentary on "White girls vs Persian girls" has several functions: the revoicing of *I have madrak* allows viewers to mock the Iranian woman's desire to obscure the truth by using selective code-switching to hide key words, even though as far as the audience can tell, no one is listening on their conversation. Revoicing of this code-switching also allows viewers to mock the practice of hymen surgery and its accompanying hypocrisy. Positive comments, especially those by first-generation Iranians, that affirm the veracity of the performance

reinforce the stereotypes invoked by the vine. Negative comments, on the other hand, allow viewers who find the portrayal threatening to challenge the vine by questioning the performer's authority to portray first-generation Iranian women. Through negative commentary, some first-generation Iranians assert their authority on contemporary Iranian culture to challenge the vine's stereotype.

> -Nowadays its [sic] not true I have not seen any persian girl like that. its for at least 10 years ago
>
> -I'm sorry but I've lived in Iran all my life and she's right, this isn't true. And when you say that girls who live in Iran are like that ur just judging from god know what girl ur talking about but the girls I know aren't like this at all

These comments misread (either deliberately or otherwise) the vine's use of exaggeration to comment on Iranian women's disingenuous attitude toward sexuality in a playful way by focusing instead on the cultural authenticity of the narrative. These comments also criticize the vine on the basis of Sahar's lack of authority on contemporary Iranian society because, as her unmarked English belies, she has grown up in North America. By asserting their own authority through statements like "I have not seen any persian girl like that" and "I've lived in Iran all my life," these commenters question the legitimacy of Sahar's

cultural knowledge in order to contest depictions of Iranians that threaten their own cultural capital.

Identity and Intertextuality: Rap vs Persian

Second-generation Iranians use popular music as a tool for emphasizing their ability to manipulate their identities without using language. These vines juxtapose Iranians' reactions to hip hop or hard rock with their responses to Iranian music, typically presented in the form of flowery Persian pop songs. These vines generally begin with a shot of an Iranian listening to hip hop, their faces etched with the angry, serious expression typically seen in rap music videos. The vine then cuts to the same performer listening to a flamboyantly upbeat Iranian song while smiling and dancing or moving in a manner that would be indexed as feminine within an Anglo-American cultural context. These vines serve several functions: they allow viewers to align with the performer across linguistic, generational and socioeconomic backgrounds. They circulate ideologies of Iranian masculinity as inclusive of behaviors that outsiders might index as feminine. Perhaps most saliently, music allows second-generation performers and their viewers to take part in a momentary imagining of transnational belonging that doesn't require linguistic knowledge.

In the vine “Listening to Rap vs Listening to Persian,” the performer, Nima, indexes specific traits and ways of being to each cultural identity he performs without incorporating language (except through the songs themselves). The vine opens with a shot of Nima driving and bobbing his head along to a hard rap song while glaring ahead then cuts to a shot of Nima smiling broadly and moving along to an upbeat Persian song. By pitting hard rap against Iranian pop music, the performer emphasizes the difference and incompatibility between the cultures associated with each genre and thus positions hip hop culture as outgroup. At the same time, the performance identifies Nima as a consumer of both hip hop and Iranian pop culture. By not inserting his own commentary into the vine, Nima on the one hand eliminates the host persona that emphasizes his sociolinguistic prowess and on the other hand allows for a wide array of interpretations by viewers. The humor created through this juxtaposition results in part from the seamlessness of the transition. Rather than introduce each segment like performers in other vines, Nima transitions from one persona to the other without interruption. The seamlessness of the transition emphasizes the fluidity of the performer’s identity and his facility in shifting from one culture to another. In addition to embodying traits that index two contrasting cultural

identities, the performer also embodies and juxtaposes two different conceptions of masculinity. Thus, the joke at the heart of the performance relies not only on the absurdity of seeing two contrasting cultural identities side by side but also on witnessing the same performer embody the hypermasculinity associated with hip hop culture and a middle eastern masculinity that indexes effeminate characteristics (smiling, flamboyant physical movements). Through this juxtaposition the performer mocks Middle Eastern masculinity but also embodies this very masculinity at the same time.

By contrast to the above vine, Sahar's vine repeats the exact same trope but does so in a way that assigns value judgements to each type of music. By privileging Iranian pop music over rap music, Golshani denies the fluidity of her identity. As a result, the vine garners fewer likes and elicits negative comments from some of the viewers. The interruption of the two performances also breaks the momentum of the joke, unlike Nima's vine. This vine also further proves that the other vine was successful because of the statements it made about masculinities. When that element is removed, the vine ends up being less humorous and attractive to the members of the vines community, though it still receives a higher number of likes than many of the vines that contain other

themes. These vines show how pop culture draws out certain aspects of an individual's cultural identity that don't come out in other spaces—which in effect is what viewers of vines do in this space. A personal connection to Iranian cultural production becomes a way for Iranians to connect across linguistic, socioeconomic, geographic and generational lines.

One of the vines about music even directly engages private versus public spaces by structuring the vine as "Persians in public" versus "Persians in private." The vine suggests that the performers adhere to certain standards of masculinity when appearing in public, whereas they are free to express a stereotypically flamboyant Middle Eastern masculinity in private. What's interesting about this vine is that, although the performers structure the vine as public versus private behavior, the actual space shown in the vine doesn't change. In both segments, the performers are featured inside a dark vehicle which appears to be in a garage, implying either that the public versus private space is a part of the narrative that exists outside of the vine itself or that the space itself is irrelevant to the vine. This vine and other vines that take place in a vehicle parallel the vines page itself. A vehicle, while sealing the driver off from public space, also possesses permeable borders. The windows expose the driver

and passengers to other people on the road. Doors can easily open to the streets. People can be let into the car or let out of it. But while the vehicle in each vine is technically grounded within the boundaries of time and space, the use of music and the movement of bodies becomes a way to create a transnational space within the vehicle. The vehicle, just like the vines page, becomes a heteroglossic, dialogic space, a space where disparate masculinities and cultural identities co-exist and are put in conversation with one another. Just as vehicles simultaneously seal people off from and provide access to the larger public sphere, the vines exist in the wider global public space of Facebook, where they are theoretically available to anyone (including non-members of Facebook), and yet they require insider knowledge (both linguistic and cultural pragmatics) in order to become accessible to viewers.

These performances also demonstrate the potential for vines to create discursive possibilities that might be less likely or impossible in offline contexts. This is not to attribute novelty to the technology itself or to privilege the performers' innovations over discursive innovations that take place in offline interactions. Examining the emergence of and response to subgenres that take shape on the Iranian Vines page reveals insights into the subtle ways that

participants in this space weave together different cultural perspectives and voices. Another way by which Iranians on the vines page express the relationship between pop culture and cultural identity is to insert an Iranian narrative into a widely known American pop song. The two vines that fit this description were both made by second generation Iranians using the popular western song "Royals," by popular New Zealander musician Lorde. The first vine, by Keeon, features a man singing a portion of the song and replacing the original lyrics with names of Iranian foods. The second vine mimics the first and the title implies that the vine represents the female version of the original. Rather than replace the song's original lyrics with names of food, the performer in this vine replaces the lyrics with methods of hair removal. Both vines reinforce stereotypes about gender and Iranian identity. The first vine plays on the stereotype of the Iranian man as gluttonous and obsessed with Iranian food while the second vine introduces the trope of Iranian (and other Middle Eastern) women as concerned with grooming their body hair, which is substantial compared to Anglo-American women's bodies. Both vines create narratives of Iranian bodies using a highly recognizable example of western popular culture. The success of Keeon's vine stems in part from his use of English with a heavy

Iranian accent when singing the song. The mock accent supports the reading of the performances as evocative of stereotypes about Iranians in diaspora by creating distance between the second-generation performer and the first-generation persona.

Metalinguistic Mocking

The YouTube video "Shit Persian Moms Say," uploaded on Jan 20 2012 as a parody of the highly popular "Shit Girls Say," strings together several seconds-long clips cut back to back and featuring a young Iranian man playing the role of his first-generation Iranian mother. The man wears a headscarf pushed back to reveal a mess of black bangs and speaks English with a thick Persian accent while yelling out in pragmatically incorrect English such absurd statements as "Reza, get off of MyFace!" and "Can you tell me where Trader Joey's is?" As of January 2016, the video had received 406,574 views, 2,845 likes and 122 dislikes as well as 876 comments, in many of which viewers (whose usernames indicated Iranian origins) confirmed the accuracy of the performer's imitation of his mother with comments like "this is literally my life" and "100000% right. hahaha." By decontextualizing brief moments when the mother's mistakes in English become humorous and stringing them together like a visual list, the

performer creates ingroup solidarity with other children of first-generation Iranians. This decontextualization indexes such linguistic features as pronouncing an "e" in front of a word that begins with "s" to the first-generation Iranian identity, enregistering a way of speaking English already recognizeable to second-generation viewers as the comments indicate. In March of 2013, about six months before the first video appeared on the Iranian Vines page, the popular social media outlet Buzzfeed published a list called "28 Signs You Were Raised By Persian Parents in America,"[65] written by Buzzfeed's Iranian American social media director Samir Mezrahi. The code-switching in the subtitle "*Dasteh shoma dard nakoneh* [thank you] for reading this" suggests Mezrahi intends his list for a second-generation Iranian American audience. In the list, which catalogues popular tropes associated with muslim Iranians (an emphasis on marriage, family, education and professional success, a love for high end European cars like BMWs and Mercedes, *taar'of*, and Iranian foods like saffron ice cream and yogurt soda that might seem particularly strange and exotic to outsiders) 7 of the 28 items refer to sociolinguistic differences between Iranians and non-Iranians:

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[65] Mezrahi, Samir. "28 Signs You Were Raised By Persian Parents in America," http://www.buzzfeed.com/samir/signs-you-were-raised-by-persian-parents#.jqeqaG4ark

the absurdity of literal translations of Persian idioms into English, pragmatic differences in politeness behaviors as a result of *taar'of*, first-generation Iranians' difficulty pronouncing 's' when it appears at the beginning of a word and second-generation Iranians' difficulty understanding relatives who speak Persian. While both of these examples are most accessible to second-generation Iranians in the U.S., the list's location in a mainstream publication and the video's allusion to "Shit Girls Say," a parody of young, white middle-class women's speech patterns enable Iranian viewers to participate in the mainstream. In the absence of mainstream media representations of Iranian Americans, these examples of cultural production connect second-generation Iranians to the larger U.S. society even while relying on the reinforcement of ingroup ties to which most people outside of the community don't have access.

The linguistic features of first-generation Iranians mocked by the examples mentioned above also become the subject of mockery in many second-generation vines. Like identity-switching vines, these performances allow second-generation Iranians to demonstrate their linguistic knowledge without necessarily exhibiting fluency in Persian. Whereas the code-switching vines implicitly create connections between identity-negotiation and language use, the

second-generation Iranian performers of metalinguistic vines demonstrate, in more explicit terms, the relationship between their identities and language. Just as the structure of the code-switching/identity-switching vines allows second-generation Iranians to zoom in on moments of rupture, the metalinguistic vines also use language to emphasize their particular vantage point. The decontextualized moments of interaction require the performer and viewer to have enough knowledge of both Iranian and non-Iranian cultures that they can recognize the joke. By positioning themselves toward others' language use, the speakers reveal the relationship between their own identity and language. Like identity-switching vines metalinguistic mocking allows second-generation Persian speakers to reposition themselves toward dominant sociolinguistic hierarchies.

2.4 Iranian Insults Don't Go Well in English

[the vine opens with a young Iranian man standing against a bedroom door]

1 Arash: Persian insults that just don't make sense in English

2 [Camera cuts abruptly to another shot of Arash standing in the same place as before, this time with an angry look on his face] Arash [yelling in a Persian accent] Vat did you say, Father Fire

3 [Camera cuts again to another shot of Arash in the same room]

Arash [yelling] *Goh Khordi beri birun emshab* No way are you going to go out tonight.

[Camera cuts once again to the same spot]

4 Arash [in English with a Persian accent]: Your room looks like shit. Clean it, Father Dog!

Arash mocks common Iranian insults by inserting literal translations of them into his performance of accented English without explaining them. As a result, these insults, Father Fire, Father Dog, which make sense in their Persian context become absurd and lose their pragmatic function. Speakers use these insults, which roughly translate to "bastard," or "son of a bitch," in their proper sociopragmatic Persian context in order to mock someone in a mild, playful manner. Through his implicit portrayal of an angry Iranian father, Arash simultaneously draws attention to humorous differences between English and Persian and also pokes fun at Iranian parental authority by mocking the father's

accent and stripping his insults of their symbolic power. In English, Arash's native language, the insults become nonsensical. Arash thus repositions parental authority as inferior to his authority as a native English speaker who also has an understanding of Persian. By highlighting the absurdity of Persian from an outsider perspective through the use of literal translation, Arash positions his bilingualism as a vehicle for creating humor. What might have been a liability within the community's dominant ideologies thus becomes a way to secure sociolinguistic capital.

The mocking practices examined here represent a small cross-section of sociolinguistic maneuvering these speakers use on social media in order to reposition their bilingual, bicultural identities within a hierarchy that not only values monolingual Persian speakers and Iranian nationalist superiority, but which tends to render invisible the identities that diverge from its ideologies. This analysis also reinforces the potential for social networking sites as a vehicle for better understanding sociolinguistic phenomena in everyday interaction. The performances analyzed on this particular site draw special attention to the resources that second-generation immigrants already possess and the skills they use to draw from multiple identities and hierarchies in order to acquire

sociolinguistic and social capital and to enhance ingroup solidarity. Vines not only provide a space for displaying these skills and resources, they also emphasize second-generation immigrants' awareness of them and their agency in defining cultural knowledge.

Chapter 5: Ideologies of Authenticity

In circulating ideologies of authenticity, members of the Iranian Vines community navigate multiple sociolinguistic hierarchies at one time. The dominant hierarchy within the Iranian community in diaspora values native Persian proficiency. At the same time, this hierarchy is nested within the global sociolinguistic hierarchy that values English above other languages. The complex interplay of these hierarchies not only informs many of the performances that appear on the Iranian vines page, it also provides a backdrop for interactions between members. Through such sociolinguistic practices as stancetaking, stylized mocking and revoicing, first-generation Iranians play with these hierarchies to position themselves as the gatekeepers of authenticity. For these speakers, performing Iranian authenticity carries less symbolic value than the authority to determine what constitutes Iranianness. Whereas second-generation Iranians primarily use their roles as performers to reposition themselves within hierarchies that devalue their bilingualism, first-generation Iranians use the evaluative role of audience to circulate ideologies of linguistic purism and to position native Persian speakers as more authentically Iranian. While instances of

language policing by native speakers in response to heritage speakers occurred relatively infrequently, this practice has a significant impact on the cultural dynamics of the site. Whereas second-generation Iranians use their position as both outgroup and ingroup members to perform Iranian identity in ways that earn them sociolinguistic capital through humor, most of the first-generation Iranians don’t have access to the vantage point expressed by these performers. Rather, first-generation Iranians use some of the features of performative speech (e.g. double voicing, word play) in their comments to establish the boundaries of authenticity.

In this chapter, I focus my analysis on the sociolinguistic practices of native Persian speakers, namely stylistic mocking, revoicing and stancetaking in order to determine how first-generation Iranians gain symbolic power through the circulation of linguistic purist ideologies. My analysis shows that this group of Iranians doesn’t use performance to define Iranian authenticity in linguistic terms; rather, native Persian speakers on this site position themselves as judges who evaluate performances of Iranian identity as authentic or inauthentic. This role allows them to playfully engage and reposition themselves within sociolinguistic hierarchies that devalue the Persian language and Iranian culture.

Through stancetaking, native Persian speakers frame their own use of code-switching and/or accent as authentic. This framing makes it possible for native Persian speakers to strategically use language to navigate multiple hierarchies. By taking a negative stance toward speakers of “Bad Persian,” they distance themselves from stereotypes of Iranian immigrants who have lost touch with their culture while at the same time using code-switching to demonstrate their knowledge of English. While the comments section operates according to a different set of rules than vines, themselves, many of the comments provided by native Persian speakers use language in ways that drew attention to the form as well as the content. As Bauman tells us, this focus on form characterizes performative speech.

On the whole, the Iranian Vines page was a stance-rich site where participants not only expressed their own stances in response to the vines themselves, but also took stances on other comments, either reinforcing or disaligning with a given stance. Within the broader categories of positive and negative stancetaking, commenters chose from a number of different types of stances to linguistically position themselves as superior to the position of the speaker performing in the vine.

The comments sections provides participants with a range of stances from which to choose in response to the vines created by other participants. This division creates a dynamic wherein native speakers at times used the evaluative role of audience member to act as critics not just of a vines performance, but of particular linguistic forms used by those speakers. Stancetaking practices through the posting of comments had several significant functions in the social space of the Iranian Vines page: a) they expressed alignment or disalignment with the framing of a particular sociocultural phenomenon as portrayed by vines b) They influenced the structure of the site by contributing to the repetition of particular themes and/or to discourage styles or topics of vines c) they contributed to the enregisterment of speech forms by indexing them to the social identities represented by participants. d) they indexically linked ideologies of language to ideologies of authenticity within the Iranian diaspora context

Ideologies of Language Purism

Many of the stancetaking practices of native speakers on the Iranian Vines Facebook page analyzed here reflect and support a linguistic purist ideology. The belief in a "pure" Persian persisted despite the use of both English and Persian (including Romanized Persian and Persian script) throughout the site and its

location on Facebook, an English-dominated space. In some cases, native speaker participants took stances in support of linguistic purism while their actual linguistic practices consisted of translanguaging in various forms. Translanguaging can be defined as "the dynamic process whereby multilingual language users mediate complex social and cognitive activities through strategic employment of multiple semiotic resources to act, to know and to be"[66]and is used here to acknowledge the multiplicity of practices by which native and heritage bilingual Persian speakers express their ethnolinguistic identities and ingroup affiliations. The inconsistency of purist ideologies directly expressed by speakers and their own practices, as well as the heteroglossic nature of the Iranian Vines page supports findings in studies of linguistic purism[67] in other contexts, such as the language learning classroom, where researchers found that speakers' actual practices differ, sometimes, starkly, with their purist attitudes toward language use. Within this online community, the use of code-switching to further a linguistic purist agenda functions as a deliberate practice that allows native Persian speakers to acquire sociolinguistic capital through the use of

[66] Garcia, Ofelia and Wei, Li. *Translanguaging: language, bilingualism and education*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[67] For discussions of language purism, see Mendoza-Denton (2008) and Hill (1985).

English, thereby repositioning themselves within hierarchies that devalue Persian.

Through comments that circulate linguistic purist ideologies, first-generation Iranians interpret the second-generation Iranians' performances of identity as failed representations of Iranian authenticity. This interpretation enables first-generation Iranian viewers to use their evaluative role as audience to make decisions about the performer's membership. By ignoring the interpretative frame of the performance, which guides the viewer toward an understanding of its sociocultural objectives, viewers make comments that respond not to the performance itself but to the metalinguistic meanings of the performance. This tension appears throughout the comments sections of vines which feature nonstandard usages of Persian or accents that mark the performer as other. In vines in which performers use double-voicing in the form of English spoken with a heavy Persian accent, however, the comments don't call into question the indexing of those speech patterns to a first-generation Iranian Persian speaker identity, ultimately reinforcing the dominance of English in this space.

Bad Persian

In the vine, "Iranians when they step out of Iran," Saman, a first-generation Iranian participant uses identity-switching to mock a style of Persian associated with Iranians who live outside of Iran and no longer speak Persian with the same degree of ease they experienced before they left. According to the vine's narrative, Iranian lose touch with their authentic identities, a forgetting that manifests primarily in the deterioration of their Persian language abilities. Through stylization, Saman enregisters "Bad Persian," Persian spoken with a thick American accent and English code-switching, and indexes the style to the stereotype of the Los Angeles Iranian, a social identity associated with dishonesty, inauthenticity and materialism.

Example 3.1: Iranians When They Step Out of Iran

[The scene opens with a close-up of a young man in a gray sweater, a nervous expression on his face. He's speaking on the phone]

1 *Dash vizam jur shod farda miram Los Anjeles* Dude, I got my visa. Tomorrow I'm going to L.A.

[Cut to shot of the same man walking out of the airport, wearing aviator glasses and a shirt with a logo of the United States on it]

2 *Chetori? Are, residam. Inja kheyli nice-e* How are you? Yes, I've arrived. It's really nice here

By speaking mock stylized Persian and dressing in a style typical of Los Angeles residents (sports jacket, aviator glasses) in the second half of the vine, Saman evokes the stereotype of the Iranian American living in Los Angeles who has, within a short period of time, lost touch with his native Iranian culture, as signaled by his style of Persian. The brevity of the vine further exaggerates the rapid deterioration of the native speaker's Persian upon his arrival in the U.S. The compression of time in the vine on the one hand yields humor by exaggerating the rate of language loss and on the other hand suggests that the language loss is in fact a façade; Iranians pretend to forget Persian the moment they arrive in L.A. The ambiguity of the performance allows for both interpretations by the audience. The style of speaking the performer mocks in this vine can be interpreted on the one hand as a dishonest means of earning symbolic power in a place that encourages distancing oneself from Iran. On the other hand, the style can be interpreted as a reflection of the natural language loss that among Iranians living outside of Iran over generations. Regardless of the interpretation, however, the vine circulates ideologies of language and

authenticity that view the ability to speak standard native speaker Persian as central to authentic Iranian identity. By portraying a first-generation Iranian immigrant who speaks Persian in a style typical of second-generation Iranians, the vine also suggests an inherent inauthenticity underlying heritage Persian. Notably, despite the prevalence of remarks on language and language loss on the site, no other vine consciously enregisters Americanized Persian as a style, linking the features of speech noted above to the social identity of the Los Angeles Iranian. Just as only second-generation Iranians who can speak English with a mainstream American accent have the authority to mock Iranian English, Saman's authentication as a native speaker of Persian grants him the authority to mock Americanized Persian.

The comments for "Iranians when they step out of Iran," further reinforce the ideologies of authenticity it circulates. Of the 264 comments (as of January 2016), the comment that garnered the highest number of likes (77) expresses disdain for the "type of Iranian" portrayed.

> *-Damesh garm!!!!! Kheyli badam miad az injur irania 2 rooz mian invar 2ta kalame yad migiram masalan farsi yadeshoon rafte ashghala!!!!*
>
> Good for him!!!!! I really hate these types of Iranians who come here and after two days and learning two words act as if they've forgotten Persian, the trash!!!!

The comment furthers the vine's ideological agenda by suggesting that the character featured in this performance represents an entire subgroup of Iranians in diaspora who deliberately distance themselves from Iran by pretending to forget the Persian language. The disdain expressed in the comment also frames the performance as a critique of the style portrayed, a framing reinforced by the comment's position at the top of the section. The substantial support of this sentiment suggests this feeling resonates among other viewers. Other comments contribute to the enregisterment of the style displayed in the vine by aligning their stance with Saman's and critiquing the group to which the vine refers.

> *-Badbakhtaye taze be doran reside on vaght engilisiam ba lahjeye farsi harf mizanan :))))*

These poor upstarts also speak English with a Persian accent

Metalinguistic comments such as those cited above allow native Persian speakers who have left Iran to align themselves against those they identify as *taze be doran reside*, a phrase that roughly translates to upstarts or new money. Within the context of this vine, the term also applies to recent Iranian immigrants whose situation has improved by virtue of their arrival in the U.S. and who the commenters perceive as promoting an inauthentic Iranian identity in order to

acquire social capital in their new environment. One commenter takes this act of stancetaking even further by accusing the performer of hypocritically aligning himself with Los Angeles Iranians through his use of English in the title of the vine.

> *-Alan to ke esme videot o engilisi neveshti kheili fargh dari bahashon?*
>
> Is there much of a difference between them and you, who've written the title of your video in English

This comment reflects the complexity of stancetaking as a tool for promoting language ideologies within the comments section. Here, the commenter simultaneously aligns and disaligns with Saman's mocking of Iranians who speak Persian with an American accent. On the one hand, the comment supports Saman's mocking of Persian-English code-switching by drawing attention to the use of English in the vine's title and equating it with the same inauthenticity portrayed in the performance. On the other hand, the comment disaligns with Saman's stance by questioning his authority to mock this group of Persian speakers because of his own use of English. It's the mocking of this group in the first place, however, that allows the commenter the opportunity to express his stance toward code-switching as a sign of Iranian inauthenticity and to promote a purist ideology that frowns on any code-

switching. The lack of support for this comment (it received zero likes), and the absence of any similar comments, suggests that most viewers don't view the use of an English title as a form of code-switching that reveals Saman's inauthenticity or hurts his legitimacy as a native Persian speaker. Indeed, many of the comments throughout the site point to the understanding that code-switching, in and of itself, does not contradict Persian purist ideologies. As long as the speaker demonstrates native Persian proficiency, the performer signals an interpretative fame that prompts the audience to view code-switching as part of a native Persian speaker identity. This frame also applies to speakers whose stance clearly aligns with linguistic purism, for instance those who mock Persian heritage speakers. Within such a frame, English code-switching can be used to demonstrate the speaker's cleverness and sociolinguistic capital. Similarly, Saman's authority to mock this variety of Persian stems from his ability to successfully authenticate as a native Persian speaker. By demonstrating his native proficiency in Persian during the second half, Saman positions himself as someone with the authority to recognize the legitimacy or illegitimacy of varieties of Persian.

The narrative of this particular vine contextualizes the circulation of

linguistic purist ideologies in the comments sections of other vines, which will be analyzed in the sections following. As the analysis in the previous chapter showed, second-generation Iranian immigrants frame code-switching as evidence of their linguistic and cultural prowess, their facility in moving between worlds. According to the narrative of "Iranians when they step outside of Iran," however, Iranians ultimately use selective code-switching and an American accent, not out of a lack of Persian ability or a desire to express multiple identities, but out of disloyalty to their origins and as an attempt to assimilate into U.S. culture by sacrificing their authentic identities. Such a narrative connects language use to ideas of what constitutes a moral person within this diasporic space. By mocking the American accent and selective code-switching, this participant uses performance to enregister these qualities to the *taze be doran reside* social persona and its accompanying character traits: dishonesty, disloyalty and superficiality. This performance also creates continuity between performative comments addressing second-generation language use. Even when taking on the role of vine performer, first-generation Iranians use performance to assume the role of gatekeepers of Iranian authenticity.

The presence of multiple hierarchies complicates the framing of code-

switching in the narratives offered by first and second-generation Iranians. Whereas many of the second-generation Iranians performing on the site gain symbolic power by challenging a hierarchy that favors native Persian proficiency, first-generation Iranians appear to be working against a hierarchy that values English above Persian. Within this hierarchy, native Persian speakers can deride those who speak nonstandard Persian because this language, while presented as illegitimate, also grants the speaker sociolinguistic capital in the Iranian community outside of Iran as well as in the larger English-dominant society. Often, commenters play with this hierarchy by using English code-switching strategically while mocking heritage Persian, emphasizing their own cleverness while also demonstrating their knowledge of English. In both cases, the speakers use their sociolinguistic capital in one hierarchy to challenge the other.

Come, Let's Wrestle

In 2010, the popular Iranian rap group, Zedbazi, released a song called "Iroonie LA." In the song, the lead singer of the band uses code-switching, falsetto and an exaggerated American accent to mock a style of speech that indexes the Iranian community in Los Angeles. The song offers a scathing critique of Iranians in L.A., evoking stereotypes of this population as superficial,

Example 3.2: Iroonie L.A. (L.A. Iranian) by

materialistic, and unintelligent, overly concerned with outward appearances and money. Like the performer in "Iranians when they step out of Iran," the main singer of the song uses double-voicing to mock this style of Persian.

1 Migi "Speaking Farsi baram yejuri sakhte"/	You say, "Speaking Persian is a bit difficult for me."
2 Ay no dat vali behem begu Chejuri rafte	I know that but tell me how
did un Lahjeye aalie Amricayi	that great American accent
Tu oon kalleye khalie ariayi?	get into your empty, imaginary head

Such lyrics reflect the complexity of the first-generation Iranian's relationship to the Iranian community in Los Angeles. The line "how did this great American accent get into that empty, imaginary brain of yours," while perhaps ironic in its use of "great" expresses an ambivalent relationship to the American accent and other symbols of westernization. Just as Saman's authentication as a native speaker allows him to mock "Bad Persian," the singer's authority as a native speaker enables him to speak from the perspective of the second-generation Iranian, and to use a western musical style while still maintaining distance from the westernized persona he's mocking. The song was

a hit on YouTube, with 71,011 views as of February 2016. In 2012, another version of the song was uploaded to YouTube in a video that featured clips from "Shahs of Sunset," a reality television series produced by Bravo that followed a group of Iranians living in the Beverly Hills neighborhood of Los Angeles. The show received a great deal of notoriety for its portrayal of Iranians as vapid, indulgent, out of touch with Iranian culture and reckless. The intertextuality of the second video reinforces the veracity of the stereotypes portrayed.

The ridicule animated by this song and by the vine, "When Iranians step outside of Iran," whose comments reference the song, does not dominate the comments or performances by first-generation Iranians but it nevertheless informs them, invoking an interpretative frame in which "Bad Persian," necessarily represents an inauthentic act of identity, regardless of the speaker's motives, that warrants mocking by the audience. This frame becomes particularly visible in the vines in which second-generation Iranians make language errors. The interpretative frame of the recorded performance, which prompts the audience to approach language use with special scrutiny and to expect a higher degree of quality compared to everyday conversational contexts, intensifies critical reactions to nonstandard usages of Persian. The first vine to

feature a nonstandard usage of Persian

Example 3.3: Pedar Bia Koshti Begirim

[The vine begins with a close up of a young man standing in a living room]

1 Rumeil: When you feel strong compared to your dad

[Cut to another shot of the same young man standing in the same spot]

2 Rumeil: *Pedar bia koshti konim* Dad, let's wrestle

[Cut to the same young man but now standing on the opposite side of the living room]

3 Rumeil (playing the role of his father) *Bashe* Okay

[Cut to the young man, standing in the same spot as in the first two shots. He looks suddenly afraid and begins to run backwards.]

4 Rumeil: *Na shukhi kardam shukhi kardam!* No, I was kidding, I was kidding!

Like other identity-switching performances by second-generation Iranians, Rumeil's vine displays his ability to identify comical misunderstandings between second-generation Iranians and their parents and to demonstrate the facility with which he switches between languages and cultural

identities. Rather than read the performance according to its interpretative frame, however, many of the viewers focused instead on Rumeil's usage of *bia koshti konim* for "come let's wrestle," rather than the standard *bia koshti begirim.* The use of the verb *kardan,* which means "to do," but when used by itself means "to fuck," amplifies the comedic value of the mistake. By framing Rumeil's performance as a representation of second-generation cluelessness, commenters position themselves above heritage Persian speakers on the site's sociolinguistic hierarchy. Commenters also use the mistake as an opportunity to acquire greater symbolic capital by making witty remarks that display their linguistic savvy and earn them likes and affirmative replies. The highest-ranking comment for Rumeil's vine exemplifies this savvy by revoicing the mistake in such a way that not only mocks Rumeil's use of language but also places him at the center of a joke that capitalizes on the verb *kardan*'s sexual connotations:

bepaa koshti nakonatet Be careful wrestling doesn't fuck you

This comment, which earned 151 likes, three times as many as the second-highest ranking comment for this vine, also places the speaker in a queer subject position. The overwhelming display of support for the comment attests to its effectiveness in articulating the connection between linguistic purism and power

from the perspective of the native speaker evaluators. Other users of the site reward the commenter not only for the power of his comment to delegitimize Rumeil's nonstandard usage, but also respond to the cleverness of his delivery, underlying the performative nature of language produced within the comments section. In performance, speakers create a frame around their speech that allows the audience to take the speech act out of its given context and repeat it elsewhere. The top comment for Rumeil's vine demonstrates this process of recontextualization. By reusing the nonstandard form of "to wrestle" that Rumeil unintentionally produces to make new meanings in a performative style, the commenter draws attention to his own expert use of language while at the same time highlighting Rumeil's erroneous usage.

Repeating the mistake becomes another way for users to take a mocking stance toward the nonstandard usage, while at the same time framing their stancetaking as an act of individual expression, unlike those who choose to like other comments that mock the mistake. The repetition of the comment also allows speakers who position themselves as either native speakers of Persian or authorities on Persian (in the case of heritage speakers with a high level of Persian proficiency), to visually assert their position as the ultimate judges of

identity performance. Through the repeated acknowledgment of language use deemed to be in error, the heretofore unseen presence of the native speaker viewer, whose role consists primarily of policing the language use of the heritage speakers, becomes visible. This repetition, a form of what Bakhtin refers to as revoicing, a speech act in which the speaker repeats another speaker's utterance. Far from neutral, revoicing always evaluates an instance of language use as either good or bad.

Native Persian speakers use revoicing in the comments to identify a given utterance as "Bad Persian" and to express a stance that positions them as authorities who decide which speech acts constitute legitimate Persian. Of the 124 comments posted under this vine, 14 (11%) consisted of revoicings of "koshti konim." An additional 13 comments make reference to the mistake, either mocking the usage, offering the correct form or commenting on Rumeil's and/or other second-generation Iranians' language use in general.

Table 1.1: Critical Comments for "Pedar Bia Koshti Begirim" (Translated into English)

Comment	No. of Likes

1. Be careful wrestling doesn't fuck you	151
2. Wrestling can't be done (fucked)	8
3. Well I'm sure we all can tell he is incapable of speaking Farsi fluently, so how about stop making fun of the poor guy. Seriously	26
4. Not *koshti konim*, *koshti begirim*. Cute accent	15
5. This idiot doesn't know how to speak Persian at all. *Bia koshti konim*? As if wrestling can be done/fucked	0
6. They don't do/fuck wrestling, they do/fuck your back	0
7. Why is the Persian of these Iranian Americans so fucked up?	0
8. They use *begirim* for wrestling, not *kardan*	0
9. That he knows Persian at all and made an Iranian vine is a lot	1
10. R.I.P. Farsi	0

Comments generally fell under one of four different stancetaking categories: comments that praised the humor of the vine without mention of the

language error, comments that revoiced *koshti konim* to identify it as an error, comments that corrected and/or mocked Rumeil's or other Iranian Americans' language use, and comments that defended Rumeil against his critics. In some cases, the categories overlapped and the speaker used multiple stances in order to align with more than one ideology. The third comment in the chart for instance, disaligns with commenters who mock Rumeil's linguistic mistake by reproaching them for their remarks. At the same time, this commenter reinforces the linguistic purist ideologies circulated by the commenters she criticizes by suggesting that Rumeil's nonstandard usage of *to wrestle* indicates "he is incapable of speaking Farsi fluently." This comment thus draws support from viewers who wish to disalign with insulting comments and those who want to challenge the legitimacy of Rumeil's Persian.

Some participants use metalinguistic comments to frame Rumeil's error as emblematic of a larger threat to Persian language maintenance. The comments "R.I.P. Farsi," for instance, and "Why is the Persian of these Iranian Americans so fucked up?" cleverly implement a linguistic purist ideology, challenging the legitimacy of not only Rumeil's Persian but also that of the other second-generation Iranians participating on the site. "R.I.P. Farsi" in particular positions

second-generation speakers as the transmitters of the Persian language to future generations and suggests that the nonstandard use of Persian by one speaker signals a much graver and culturally threatening problem. According to this ideology, language change not only means the loss of Iranian identity, it means the death of the language, itself. In the comment "Why is the Persian of these Iranian Americans so fucked up?" the viewer uses code-switching by stating "fucked-up" in English in an otherwise Persian sentence. This code-switching can be interpreted both as a clever mockery of nonstandard Persian and as a strategic way of displaying her bilingualism while framing English within the performance of an authentic Iranian identity.

A few days after the appearance of Rumeil's vine and the flurry of criticism and activity surrounding it, the moderator posted another vine featuring a nonstandard usage of a Persian word. As in the earlier vine, the mistake involved the incorrect use of a compound verb but didn't impede the communicative intent of the performer's speech. Commenters nonetheless responded with a flurry of criticism similar to that delivered in response to Rumeil's vine.

Example 3.4: Kharejia Aslan Ta'rof Nemishnasan [Foreigners Don't Understand *Taar'of* At All]

(1) Karejia Aslan Ta'rof Nemishnasan [Foreigners Don't Understand *Taar'of* At All]

[Scene opens to a young woman standing in a clothing store, addressing someone offscreen to her right]

1 Yasmin: *Azizam pulesh ba man*	I'll pay for it, dear

[cut to a shot of the same young woman in the same store, now standing on the right and addressing an offscreen person on her left]

2 Yasmin: *Khodeto lus nakon man midam*	Don't be silly, I'll pay for it

[cut back to shot of the woman standing on the left, addressing an offscreen person to her right]

3 Yasmin: *Khejalate maro nabar dige*	Don't embarrass us now

[cut to another shot of the woman standing on the left side]

4 Yasmin: I'll pay for it

[cut to shot of woman standing on the right]

5 Yasmin: Okay

Framed as an Iranian vs. X vine, this performance mocks the difference between *taar'of*, a complex set of Persian politeness practices that emphasizes formality and indirectness, and the more casual and direct interaction style of

North Americans. By addressing the sociopragmatic concept of *taar'of* in her vine, and by placing the Persian performance ahead of the English performance (the only vine which uses this sequence), Yasmin creates the expectation of high linguistic proficiency. In her actual performance, however, she confuses two common Persian expressions: *khejalat mikesham* (I'm embarrassed) and *aberu bordan* (to embarrass). As in Rumeil's vine, a significant portion of comments (27 of 117 or 23%) referred to the mistake or otherwise criticized or mocked her Persian ability. One such commenter suggests putting together a Persian class for the makers of vines, at once acknowledging the dominance of the Iranian vines space by heritage speakers of Persian and contesting their authority to comment on Iranian identity by questioning the legitimacy of their language use.

What do you say we put together a Persian class for creators of vines?

This comment also acknowledges the division between those who create vines and those who comment on them; heritage speakers create the majority of the vines on this page, but the comments section consists primarily of an audience of individuals positioning themselves as native speakers who, by taking a stance that reinforces linguistic purist ideologies, assert the authority to comment on other speakers' authenticity.

Table 1.2: Comments for *Kharejiya Aslan Ta'rof Nemishnasan* by Yasmin F.

Comment	**Number of Likes**
Let's Wrestle (nonstandard usage)	136
Don't embarrass us (nonstandard usage)	96
Don't embarrass us, have some shame (nonstandard usage)	53
Don't embarrass us now (nonstandard usage)	29
what the hell is *khejalate maro nabar*?	13

The table above displays the comments posted in response to Yasmin F.'s vine that received the highest number of likes. As with the top comment for Rumeil's vine, the highest ranking comment here uses revoicing in a clever way that at the same time sexualizes the speaker of the vine, placing her in a less powerful subject position. By referencing *bia koshti konim,* the commenter indirectly mocks the speaker's language use and makes an inside joke that builds ingroup solidarity with other participants who mocked Rumeil's language error. Given the sexual connotations of "let's wrestle," the comment also functions as a

proposition. In both cases, comments sexualizing the performers reinforce the native speakers' positioning of themselves as more powerful in relation to the heritage speakers. In the context of Yasmin's vine, other comments enhance this stance by remarking on the performer's physical appearance or making advances:

She has beautiful eyes

This girl is beautiful

Yasmin F, I want you

These comments show that viewers frame vines by women not only as performances of ethnic identity but also as performances of Iranian femininity. That a greater number of comments in reference to Yasmin's physical attractiveness come from women than from men suggests that women also expect other women to perform femininity through sexual attractiveness. Unlike men, however, women don't address such comments directly to Yasmin and instead refer to her in the third person.

As with Rumeil's vine, some participants use metalinguistic comments to frame the language error as representative of language deterioration among second-generation Persian speakers. The metalinguistic conversation

surrounding Rumeil's vine strengthens the underlying argument of those who see nonstandard usages of Persian as emblematic of its decline among the second-generation.

It's interesting that none of the Iranians who make vines know how to speak Persian. They've ruined our reputation.

We've really lost these Iranians outside of Iran

Through such remarks, commenters frame instances of nonstandard Persian use as failed performances of Iranian identity that signal the deterioration of the Persian language across generations. While the first comment invokes an imagined audience of outsiders with their own linguistic purist expectations, the second comment speaks to anxieties about identity loss and conveys an underlying melancholy regarding the rift between Iranians in Iran These comments allow speakers to position themselves as the ultimate authority on both Persian legitimacy and Iranian authenticity and to express anxieties about the state of Iranian culture outside of Iran. Using pronouns such "they've" and "these Iranians" places heritage speakers in the outgroup, sacrificing ingroup solidarity in support of ideologies that view linguistic purism as the key to keeping Iranian identity intact.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation has described and analyzed the online discursive practices of Persian speakers and the interrelationship between these practices and the online community where they occurred. The following chapter synthesizes these analyses by returning to the questions posed in earlier chapters then introduces some directions for future study.

How does the structure of online space and its existing evaluative framework influence the power dynamics of this site?

This study shows that the porous boundaries of the Iranian vines space lend themselves to diasporic identity-negotiation. The performative nature of the page and the comedic genre of vines also encourages stancetaking practices whereby participants circulate ideologies of Iranian authenticity. The use of recorded performances that take place within the performers' actual homes enhances the fluidity between physical and virtual space. Footage of actual spaces also allows performers to address differences between the way Iranians and non-Iranians relate to domestic, private space. The insertion of footage of

participants' homes within the semi-public setting of a Facebook page also contributes to the breakdown of binaries between private and public.

How do second generation Iranians use online performances to negotiate their ethnic/cultural identities?

This study demonstrates that second generation Iranians perform their identities on the Iranian Vines site through two main practices: identity-switching and metalinguistic mocking. Identity-switching refers to a practice particular to this genre in which second-generation performers use a variety of semiotic resources (language, dress, gesture, accent) to switch rapidly between Iranian and non-Iranian personas. The discussion in Chapter 4 shows how these performances amount to a visual code-switching that underlines the role of identity in linguistic code-switching. Using a rapid transformation into an Iranian persona as the punchline to a visual joke emphasizes the act of identity-switching. Chapter 4 revealed several findings about the function of identity-switching. First, by performing the contrasting pragmatic features of Iranians and non-Iranians, second-generation Iranians locate their "authentic" cultural identities in a third space. This was most apparent in the vines in which the creator of the vine introduced the Iranian and non-Iranian persona from the

perspective of an unmarked third persona. That the host persona does not receive an introduction suggests that this third performance represents the performer's hybridized identity. The vine itself, meanwhile, represents a fourth space, one in which the performer not only performs three different cultural identities, but also demonstrates an awareness of them.

Second, these performances disrupt sociolinguistic hierarchies that place monolinguistic Persian speakers above dominant bilinguals (those possessing a higher level of proficiency in English). The ideology of lack holds that the second-generation Iranians lack cultural authenticity because of the linguistic or pragmatic aberrations in their performance. First-generation Iranian viewers circulate and reinforce this ideology in comments challenging the performer's authenticity by pinpointing linguistic and/or pragmatic errors. By mocking both Iranian and non-Iranian personas, however, second-generation performers privilege their bilingual, bicultural subject position over a monolingual, monocultural one. By using editing to transform from an American or European to an Iranian in a matter of seconds, these performers also emphasize their facility in moving from one performance of cultural identity to another. The evaluative outcomes of these vines reveal a hierarchy in which partial access to

these two contrasting in-groups becomes more favorable than greater access to one of them. In other words, the performer who can identify pragmatic or linguistic features used by Iranians that contrast comically with corresponding features used by non-Iranians can achieve "fame" on this page by acquiring social capital through a high number of likes and positive comments.

By contrast, the performer who might demonstrate higher Persian proficiency but who lacks sufficient knowledge of cultural pragmatics in the outside culture to identify comic contrasts in language and/or behavior does not have these resources at his or her disposal. The number of likes and comments, which functions as social currency on the site, indicates where individual performances fall on this hierarchy. An analysis of comments in response to the best-received vines suggests that their success corresponds to the degree to which viewers find the vine entertaining and/or humorous. The high frequency of words (true, exactly, yes, etc.) ascribing authenticity to the performance in vines with the highest number of likes also suggests a correlation between the viewers' evaluation of the performance as authentic and the success of the vine.

These performances emphasize the contrast between the pragmatic features they imitate from each social identity in order to create a comedic effect.

In some of the vines, for instance, performers place emphasis on the parental strictness of Iranians by performing beatings or screaming and yelling while using expressions indifference or agreeableness to portray what they perceive as the laissez faire parenting style associated with non-Iranian mothers and fathers. To succeed, these performances rely on two primary factors: 1) perceived authenticity of the behaviors identified and 2) the skillful depiction of a humorous contrast between cultures. A tension thus exists in these vines between the contrasting, culturally incompatible features identified and the performer's ability to navigate between cultures seamlessly. Differentiation thus becomes a goal for the second-generation performer, a goal that often collides with the first-generation member’s desire to minimize differences between cultures in order to achieve a greater sense of belonging in the host culture. This collision suggests a conflict between the diasporic practices of Iranians who have grown up outside of Iran and the diasporic practices of Iranians who have left Iran more recently. Even though both groups use the Iranian Vines page to maintain ties to Iranian culture, they play very different roles within the same space. This conflict underscores the usefulness of theorizing diaspora as practice rather than as a fixed entity or uniform population.

In addition to identity-switching, I found that second-generation participants used metalinguistic mocking to subvert linguistic hierarchies by demonstrating a level of familiarity with both Persian and English that allows them to draw attention to the absurdity of linguistic differences between them. This practice is also a way of creating distance between heritage and native Persian speakers by suggesting an inherent compatibility between English and Persian and, by extension, between Iranian and U.S cultures.

How do first-generation Iranians reinforce ideologies of linguistic purism and authenticity through mocking?

Chapter 5 showed that first-generation Iranians use mocking practices to circulate and reinforce ideologies of linguistic purism. According to this ideology, only Persian as spoken by native Persian speakers must be recognized as legitimate. This ideology also links Iranian authenticity to native Persian proficiency, privileging linguistic ability over pragmatic or cultural knowledge as a marker of authentic Iranian identity. The discussion in Chapter 5 shows that first-generation native Persian speaker participants mock nonstandard Persian usage by non-native speaker participants in a number of different ways. One

practice involves reporting the perceived mistake in the comments without elaborating on its significance. For instance in the example of “Pedar bia koshti begirim [Father come let’s wrestle]” commenters repeated the nonstandard usage of the verb for wrestling, “bia koshti konim.” This act, while not formally a performance, carries out the functions of performative speech by decontextualizing a given speech act and drawing special attention to a linguistic feature.

A second mocking practice involves making a metalinguistic comment about the significance of the error that reflects the commenter’s concerns regarding what the error means for the Persian language and the Iranian community as a whole. For instance, comments such as “RIP Farsi,” link a single instance of a nonstandard usage to the death of the Persian language, implying that the error represents the extinction of Persian at the hands of second-generation speakers. Another comment asks “Why is the Persian of these second-generation kids so fucked up?” While they adopt different approaches, both comments reject the legitimacy of the Persian spoken by second-generation Iranians and generalize the error to a much larger phenomenon they imagine exists among the entire population of these speakers. Both comments

demonstrate the way commentary on this site facilitates metalinguistic conversations. Anxiety surrounding the loss of the Persian language, in particular, becomes the focus of many metalinguistic conversations. The third mocking practice consists of making a witty remark about the linguistic error, usually through wordplay. Similar to the first mocking practice, this type of comment resembles performative speech, placing a great deal of emphasis on the commenter's witty and creative use of language. Of the three types of mocking practices, these comments garner the highest number of likes, not surprisingly, given their proximity to performance. By demonstrating the commenter's performative ability, this category of comments, more so than the others, places the commenter in a position of power in relation to the vine's creator. All three mocking practices, regardless of whether they emphasize the commenter's use of language or the performer's, however, reinforce ideologies of linguistic legitimacy as essential to one's ethnic authenticity.

Future Directions for Study

In this dissertation, I have attempted to synthesize the sociolinguistic practices used on the Iranian Vines Facebook page in an attempt to understand the interrelationship between transnational space, language and performance.

The analyses in this dissertation have raised additional questions that suggest directions for expansion on the study or future studies. One question that the analysis raises and which I have not been able to answer is to what extent these diasporic practices can be considered unique to the Iranian case and to what extent they can be generalized to other groups. Comparative study involving the comedic performances of other ethnolinguistic communities would be one way to begin answering this question. Another question is whether anxieties surrounding language change and the way they manifest in interactions between different generations of Iranians are different now than they were thirty years ago. It's not clear whether the linguistic purist ideologies circulated on the site reflect the anxieties of Iranians who identify as immigrants rather than exiles and as such don't plan on returning. Interviewing older generations of Iranians (those who left in Iran during the second wave of immigration) about language change and Iranian identity would be one way to gain more insight into whether these language ideologies have emerged from the most recent wave of Iranian immigration or have been circulated within this population for a longer period of time.

The discussion of heritage learners in this project has also led to the question of the limits and advantages of using this category to describe a population of language learners with such varied experiences when it comes to their heritage language and their identities. Such a label creates an artificial dichotomy within a far more complicated and layered relationship. While useful for the purposes of this study, within the context of Second Language Acquisition studies and in the development of foreign language curriculum, this label proves ultimately limiting in the study of performance. The advantage of studying heritage speakers lies within the complexity of their relationship to host and home cultures and their transnational identities. These speakers are ideally situated for the study of global flows of information. Analysis of their interactions provides insight into the tension between the extreme social construction of identity in interaction and the persistence of nationalist ideologies within transnational social contexts. Heritage learners are situated between these two locales, rendering them uniquely situated to recognize both of these opposing ideas as ultimately false. Creating a new term for these speakers that more accurately identifies their subject position, rather than identifying them in relation to their home cultures would not only help eliminate the false

binary between heritage and native speakers but would also emphasize the wide array of creative possibilities for articulating the relationship between identity and language and the sense of agency this creativity affords.

This project also has wider implications for studies of cultural flow, in particular the way that the increasing blurring of binaries between physical and virtual spaces together change notions of diaspora and displacement. The increasing agency that the proliferation of user-generated content affords users of the internet more and more control over the organization of spaces, despite the existence of top-down forces in the form of moderators and pre-existing templates. The members of this site use performance to map the online space through the deliberate transfer of particular offline social spaces onto the site. The organization of the space represents the interaction between the site's top-down evaluative components, which encourage stancetaking, and performances through which performers relocate offline identity negotiation and mocking practices to a space where they can be collectively redefined.

The paradoxical nature of online interactions as both ephemera and fossil, relevant for a short time yet recorded in some cases permanently means that they rapidly become obsolete yet also make a mark on which other media genres

build, forming a kind of internet meme genealogy. Expanding the scope of this study to include the emergence of other online spaces or memes over an extended period may be a way to examine what Brubaker refers to as the erosion of diasporic boundaries over a long time.[68]

In the time since the last vine was posted on Iranian Vines in April of 2014, other Iranian Vines have continued to appear on the Vines.com page, though without the presence of the community found on the Facebook page. In their individual pages, many of the performers who participated in the Iranian Vines community continue to post performances on the same themes that appeared on the page: the strictness of parents, the comedic clash of cultures. Despite the sense of innovation brought on by the genre and the freedom individuals on the Vines.com page have to post material of their own volition (without the interference of a moderator), the subject matter appears confined to a limited number of topics. Perhaps this limitation stems from the boundaries imposed by the desire for creating ingroup solidarity and identification and the resulting attention received by performers when they succeed. Unlike vines on the Facebook

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[68] Brubaker, Rogers. "The diaspora diaspora." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2005) 28.1: 7

page, which stop playing at the end of the clip, vines on Vines.com loop endlessly, creating an echo of identity performance that reverberates without end. This echo suggests that these folk comedic identity performances are meant to be repeated, to create an illusion of continuous, magical transformation, almost the way a hologram alters an image when moved from side to side. A closer look at the purpose of repetition in performances of ethnic identity may reveal why banality trumps creativity in such fluid spaces, and how this banality paradoxically seems to strive to create an illusion of identity as a fixed entity even while the technology of the genre and the global flow of culture allows for and perhaps even necessitates, the transgression and disruption of boundaries.

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