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Persian, Dari and Tajik in Central Asia

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Abstract

There have been a number of informal debates among Persian language specialists concerning the status of Tajik and Dari vs. standard Persian. All linguists know that speech communities utilize a continuum of varieties of speech, and that the term "language" is more a political appellation than a scientifically accurate descriptor. The range of variation in Persian, Dari, and Tajik communities is quite extensive, embodying regionalisms and borrowings from other language families. The term "register" has a special status in describing languages in that it represents a speech variety that is marked for particular specific occasions. Whereas Modern Persian and Dari are very close in form, Tajik has more divergent discourse structures. Based on fieldwork carried out in Tajikistan, This paper theorizes that standard Persian as spoken in Iran has become a special register of Tajik marked for formal occasions such as political speech making, wedding orations, news broadcasts, and elevated scientific discourse. In this way the opposition between all the varieties of colloquial Tajik and standard Persian in Tajikistan resemble the diglossic opposition between dhimotiki and katherevusa in modern Greek. This paper provides several examples, and speculate on the concretization and meaning of such diglossic vocal speech registers.