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A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF MAZANDARANI, FARSI AND ENGLISH WORD ORDER, VERBS AND TENSES

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Abstract

This study deals with contrasting three languages, namely English, Farsi (Persian), and Mazandarani (Tabari). The study followed two main goals: first, providing Mazandarani and Farsi teachers with pedagogical implications in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL); and second, taking a step toward preventing the Mazandarani (Mazani) language from gradual extinction. By comparing the word order, verbs, and tenses of the three aforementioned languages, it was concluded that in some cases Mazandarani, and in other cases Farsi, is more similar to English. With respect to word order, Mazandarani and Farsi are SOV but English is SVO. Regarding verbs and tenses, contrary to English, Mazandarani and Farsi are inflected. This inflection plays an important role in forming different tenses in the conjugation process.

Keywords

contrastive analysis, Mazandarani, Mazani, Farsi, English, tense, inflection

UN ANÁLISIS CONTRASTIVO DEL ORDEN DE LAS PALABRAS, DE LOS VERBOS Y DE LOS TIEMPOS VEBALES EN MAZANDARANÍ, FARSI Y INGLÉS

Resumen

Este estudio contrasta tres idiomas: el inglés, el farsi (persa) y el mazandaraní (Tabari). Se plantea dos objetivos principales: por un lado, ofrecer a los maestros de mazandaraní y de farsi implicaciones pedagógicas cuando enseñan el inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL); y, el segundo, colaborar en los mecanismo de prevención de la lengua mazandaraní (Mazani) de su extinción gradual. Al comparar el orden de las palabras, los verbos y los tiempos de los tres idiomas antes mencionados, se concluye que,

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en algunos casos el mazandaraní, y en otros casos, el Farsi, son más similares al inglés. En cuanto al orden de las palabras, el mazandaraní y persa son lenguas SOV, mientras que el inglés es SVO. En cuanto a los verbos y tiempos verbales, a diferencia del inglés, el farsi y el mazandaraní son lenguas flexivas. Esta flexión juega un papel importante en la formación de diferentes tiempos verbales en el proceso de conjugación.

Palabras clave
análisis contrastivo, mazandaraní, Mazani, farsi, inglés, tiempo verbal, flexión

1. Introduction

In the history of second language acquisition, there have been two general hypotheses about the influence of the acquisition of one language on the acquisition of another language, namely the identity hypothesis and the contrastive hypothesis (Klein 1986). Proponents of the former (e.g., Ervin-Tripp 1974; Burt & Dulay 1975) argue that the acquisition of one language has little or no influence on the acquisition of another language. On the other hand, proponents of the contrastive hypothesis hold the position that acquisition of the structure of the first language has an influence on the acquisition of the second language (Fries 1945; Lado 1957).

In this respect, three versions have been proposed for contrastive analysis hypothesis. The strong version is based on the assumption that the more the structures in the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) are different, the more difficult they will be for L2 learners to acquire. The weak version deals only with those errors which are already proved to be problematic by contrasting the structures which are meant to be the sources of the errors (Yarmohammadi 2002). Finally, the moderate version proposed by Oller and Ziahosseiny (1970) claims that it is similarity, rather than differences, between the structures being contrasted that cause difficulty. The strong version is based on the notion of transfer which means “carrying over the habits of one’s mother tongue into the second Language” (Corder 1971: 158), while the weak version leads to an approach which makes fewer demands of contrastive theory than does the strong version (Wardhaugh 1970). However, it seems that Fallahi (1991) has presented the most

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comprehensive and simple definition of contrastive analysis (CA). He argues that CA is a branch of linguistics that brings two language systems together, sets them against each other and makes an attempt to define the similarities and differences between them (Fallahi 1991). The heyday of contrastive linguistics was in the 1960s and the 1970s of the last century, which aimed at facilitating foreign language instruction (see, for example, Alatis 1986 and Aarts 1981). However, it lost its popularity gradually, seemingly, due to the strong claims of its early proponents.

Since the use of Mazandarani has been in decline and its literary and administrative rank lost to Farsi (Borjian 2005), we have tried to compare and contrast its structure with English as an international language and lingua franca of the world to take a step toward saving this old language. Furthermore, it will have several pedagogical implications for EFL teachers and students who are native speakers of Mazandarani. Moreover, despite all the launched criticisms against contrastive analysis, due to lack of enough literature on the Mazandarani language and its comparison with other languages, we consider Fries's argument below persuasive enough to set about the present study. According to Fries (1945: 9):

> The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner.

2. Review of literature

Although some scholars like Amouzadeh (2003) and Borjian (2005) have studied some aspects of the Mazandarani language, they have mainly concentrated on such issues as bilingualism in Mazandaran and the convergence of Mazandarani and Farsi.

Despite this, very little effort has been made in contrasting Mazandarni with other languages like English. Furthermore, some of these studies are not free of criticism like the case of Borjian's (2005) study that tried to show that

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Mazandarani and Farsi have peaceful coexistence with each other. Although there is coexistence in the case of these two languages, it is not at all peaceful. If it were the case, we would not have witnessed the gradual extinction of the Mazandarani language. Due to some sociocultural and political factors, Farsi is gradually imposing itself on the Mazandarni society. The fact is that we cannot close our eyes to the gradual loss of Mazandarni's administrative and social rank to Farsi. Thus, so the notion of "peaceful coexistence" does not seem to be an acceptable term in this respect.

In another study being carried out by a research team in Iranian languages led by Professor Carina Jahani, various fields like grammatical description of some Iranian languages (e.g., Balochi and Mazandarani) are being systematically investigated. In their research, they have studied the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and discoursal features of these languages based on existing linguistic corpuses.

As mentioned above, in the body of available literature, little effort has been made to compare and contrast the structure of the Mazandarani language with the structure of another language, especially English, to provide teachers and syllabus designers with pedagogical implications while teaching English to Mazandarani native students.

3. The present study

In the present study, we have tried to focus on three important aspects of grammar, namely word order, verbs, and tenses of Mazandarani, Farsi, and English. Without having an adequate knowledge of the general pattern of word order in the second language and also different aspects of verbs like their present and past roots, active/passive voices, and their various tenses, students would face a real challenge in the process of learning an L2.

We have tried to focus mainly on the differences among the three languages in the above-mentioned aspects to equip teachers and syllabus designers with pedagogical implications to easily face students' probable challenges due to the existing discrepancies among these languages. Being prepared for these differences a

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priori would certainly help teachers and syllabus designers to encounter students' probable problems more wisely and scientifically and plan for them systematically.

Although vocabularies are known to be the building blocks of any language, we think that a large percentage of L2 learners' problems go back to the different grammatical forms and structures of the two languages and not their different vocabularies. In other words, grammar provides a basis upon which the building blocks of a language could be gradually built.

On the whole, the present study could be beneficial for linguists, especially dialectologists who are interested in saving minor groups' dialects as human beings' heritage, and teachers as well as syllabus designers who are eager to bring two or more languages together in order to compare and contrast their structure for educational purposes.

4. Word order

Considering word order and syntax, Mazandarani and Farsi are almost the same in that both are SOV[1] on the sentence level. However, compared with English, there is a considerable difference since the unmarked English sentence pattern is SVO.

(1) English: $\frac{I}{s}\frac{ate}{v}\frac{the\ apple}{o}$.
Mazadarani: $\frac{Men}{s}\frac{sə}{o}$ re$\frac{bakherdeme}{v}$.
Farsi: $\frac{Man}{s}\frac{sib}{o}$ ra$\frac{khordam}{v}$

It seems that Farsi and Mazandarani speakers would face the same challenge learning English general sentence pattern. However, contrary to Farsi, Mazandarani and English are almost the same considering their noun phrase (NP) structure. Contrary to Farsi, which is head initial Mazandarani and English are head final.

[1] List of abbreviations: S(ubject), V(erb), O(bject), Adj(ective), Adv(erb), N(oun); phonetic guide: ä: ^ or a; a: æ; OO: U; O: u (based on *Longman Dictionary Pronunciation Table*).

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(2) English: $\frac{big}{Adj}\frac{house}{head}$.

Mazandarani: $\frac{gate}{Adj}\frac{sere}{head}$.

Farsi: $\frac{khäneye}{head}\frac{boozoorg}{Adj}$.

Apparently, this syntactic difference makes Farsi-speaking English as a foreign language (EFL) students' job a little more difficult compared with Mazani-speaking EFL students. This difficulty becomes more problematic if an adverb is added to the NP.

(3) English: $\frac{Very}{Adv}\frac{big}{Adj}\frac{house}{N}$

Mazandarani: $\frac{khale}{adv}\frac{gate}{Adj}\frac{sere}{N}$

Farsi: $\frac{khaneye}{N}\frac{kheili}{Adv}\frac{boozoorg}{Adj}$

Again, it is clear from the above example that English and Mazandarani are virtually the same but Farsi-speaking EFL learners seem to face an even greater difficulty in this case since the adverb (*kheili*) is located between the noun (head) and the adjective.

Like the Old Persian Language, there are two kinds of cases (inflections) in Mazandarani, which are absent in English and modern Farsi: the ablative case and the accusative case.

(4) English: I bought the car from Ali.

Mazandarani: Mashinne Alijä (or Alije) Bakhrime.

Farsi: Mashin rä az Ali kharidam.

(5) English: where did you buy the car?

Mazandarani: Mäshinne keje Bakhri?

Farsi: Mäshin rä (az) koja kharidi?

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Unlike the previous example, by evaluating these two cases, we can conclude that Mazani-speaking EFL students are more vulnerable to face difficulty than Farsi-speaking EFL students.

5. Verbs

In this section, we will investigate the differences among verbs in the above-mentioned three languages. Roots, transitive/intransitive verbs, active/passive voices, and verb tenses will be discussed, respectively.

5.1 Past and present roots

There are two types of roots in Mazandarani and Farsi, past roots and present roots. However, in English we do not have these roots since modern English unlike old English (with the verb "be" being an exception) is not an inflected language, which means verbs in modern English are not conjugated.

There are two ways to get the past root in Mazandarani and Farsi. One way is to delete the infinitive maker ("an" in Farsi, "ən" in Mazandarani) and the other way is to delete the verb endings attached to the simple past tense of the verb.

(6) Mazandarani infinitive: Bakherdən → Bakherd: root
Farsi infinitive: khordan → khord: root

(7) Mazandarani: Bakherdi → Bakherd: root
Farsi: khordi → khord: root
(Second person singular)

In order to get the present root in Farsi, it is enough to delete the prefix *mi* and the present verb suffixes (endings). On the other hand, in Mazandarani, the present root is made only by deleting the verb endings (suffixes).

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(8) Mazandarani: kherni → kher: root
Farsi: Mikhori → khor: root

5.2 Transitive and intransitive verbs

A transitive verb is a verb characterized by having or containing a direct object (Merriam- Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2006).

(9) I $\underset{transitive\ verb}{eat}$ $\underset{direct\ object}{an\ apple}$ every day.

Unlike transitive verbs, intransitive verbs are not followed by direct objects. Like English, Mazandarani and Farsi have both transitive and intransitive verbs.

(10) English: I ate $\underset{\text{direct object}}{the\ \text{apple.}}$
Mazandarani: Men $\underset{direct\ object}{sə}$ rə Bakherdemə.
Farsi: Man $\underset{direct\ object}{sib}$ rä khordam.

From the above example, it is clear that there is a considerable difference between Mazandarani and English (also between Farsi and English) In English, the object is used after transitive verbs, but in these two languages the object is used before transitive verbs. Furthermore, the English language lacks any object markers, but in Mazandarani and Farsi "rä" and "rə" act as object markers.

5.3 Active/passive voices

In English, the passive form of a verb is made by using the following formula:

Inflected "Be" + Past participle of the verb

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(11) Active Sentence: I ate the apple yesterday.

Passive Sentence: The apple $\frac{was}{Be}\ \frac{\text{eaten}}{\text{p.p}}$ yesterday.

In Farsi, the passive form of a verb is made by using the following formula:

Past root + eh+ inflected form of "shodan" verb.

(12)

Active Sentence: Man sib rä khordam.

Passive Sentence: sib $\frac{khordeh}{past\ root}$ shod.

In Mazandarani, the passive form of a verb is made by using the following formula:

Past root + inflected form of "Bayyen" verb.

(13) Active Sentence: Men sə rə Bakherdmə.

Passive Sentence: Sə $\frac{bakherd}{past\ root}$ bayyə.

Baymə	Baymi
Bayyi	Bayni (or : Bayyeni)
Bayyə	Baynə

Table 1. The conjugation of "Bayyen".

The auxiliary verb "be" in English is used before the past participle in the passive voice but in Mazandarani and Farsi, the inflected form of the auxiliary verbs *shodan* and *bayyen* is used at the end of the sentence after the past participle (we consider *khordeh* and *bakherd* equal to English past participle).

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6. Tenses

In this section, we will investigate the differences and similarities among verb tenses in the three aforementioned languages.

6.1 The present tense

There are three present tenses in all three concerned languages. In English we have simple present, present continuous (or present progressive) and present perfect tenses. In Farsi and Mazandarani we have *Hale sädeh* (simple present), *Hale estemräri* (present continuous), and *Hale eltezämi*. Here, there is a delicate difference between English and these two Iranian languages; the point is that the English present perfect is categorized as a past tense in Farsi and Mazandarani.

6.1.1 Simple Present Tense

In order to refer to permanent situations and talk about things which happen all the time or on a regular basis, this tense can be used. Moreover, the usage of this tense is the most frequent one when talking about scientific or general facts.

Farsi persons	*Mazani persons*	*Mazani verb*	*Farsi verb*	*English verb*
Man	Mən	Khermə	Mikhorm	I eat
To	To (or tə)	Kherni	Mikhori	You eat
Ou (oo)	Və	Khernə	Mikhorad	He/ she eats
Mä	Amä	Khermi	Mikhorim	We eat
Shomä	Shemä	Kherenni(or kherneni)	Mikhorid	You eat
Ishän (Änhä)	veshon	kherennə	mikhorad	They eat

Table 2. Conjugation of the simple present tense in Farsi, Mazani and English

Contrary to Mazandarani and Farsi, the second person singular and plural (You) are the same, yet Farsi and Mazandarani speakers use second person plural for second person singular only to show their respect to their

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co-communicator. This may be a source of inter-lingual errors for their EFL learners.

As we can see in Table 2, simple present tense verb endings are {*mə, ni, nə, mi, nni, nnə*} in Mazandarani and {*am, i, ad, im, id, and*} in Farsi. This different verb endings is only one among several sources of linguistic evidence which proves Mazandarani as an independent language and not a dialect or an accent (Amouzadeh 2003).

6.1.2 Present continuous tense

This tense is used to refer to actions or situations being in progress in the present tense. A summary of this tense is presented in Table 3.

Mazani verb	*Farsi verb*	*English verb*
Daremə khermə	Däram mikhoram	I am eating
Dari kherni	Däri mikhori	You are eating
Darə khernə	Därad mikhorad	He/she is eating
Daremi khermi	Därim mikhorim	We are eating
Darenni kherenni	Därin mikhorin	You are eating
Darennə kherennə	Däran mikhoran	They are eating

Table 3. Present continuous tense in Mazani, Farsi and English

This tense is formed with the conjugated form of the auxiliary verb *Däshtan* followed by simple present tense. As it is clear from Table 3, there is a complete and one-to-one word order correspondence between all these three languages in the present continuous tense.

6.1.3 The present perfect tense

As mentioned before, Mazandarani and Farsi consider this tense as a narrative past (*Mazie naghli*). It should be mentioned that grammatically Mazandarani does not have an in dependent tense structure for present perfect; instead, simple present tense and the subjunctive mood are used in this language to carry the same meaning.

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In Farsi, the following formula is used to form the present perfect tense:

Past participle + verb endings

(14) Rafte + am (I have gone)

Or: shoste + im (we have washed)

In English the following formula is used:

** have/ has + past participle*

I have eaten a sandwich.

As mentioned above, Mazandarani native speakers are semantically able to carry the meaning presented by present perfect in their sentences.

(15) Mazandarani: Az dishu tä alän tə montazeremə.

Farsi: Az dishab ta hälä montazeretam.

English: I $\frac{\textit{have}\ \text{been wating}}{\textit{passive}\ \text{present perfect}}$ for you since last night.

(16) Mazandarani : Mə mär alan de sale ke marize.

Farsi: mädaram alän du säle ke mariz ast.

English: My mother has been sick since two years ago (or: for two years).

6.2 The past tense

6.2.1 The simple past tense

This tense is used to refer to completed actions in the past, that is, actions which began in the past and were finished. Below are formulas for making past tense in the three languages.

(17) English: subject + verb + (e) d (or, simple past root)

I watched the T.V.

Or: I $\frac{ate}{irregular\ past\ verb}$ the apple.

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(18) Farsi: simple past root + verb endings

$$\frac{\text{Raft}}{\text{Past root}}\ \frac{am}{verb ending}\ (I\ \text{went})$$

Or: $\frac{\text{Mand}}{\text{Past root}}\ \frac{i}{verb\ \text{ending}}\ (You\ \text{stayed})$

(19) Mazandarani: simple past root + verb endings.

$\frac{Bakherd}{past\ root}\ \frac{(e)mə}{verb\ ending}$ (I ate)

Or: $\frac{Bamerd}{past\ root}\ \frac{ə}{verb\ ending}$ (He/ She died)

It is clear from the above formulas and examples that in Mazandarani and Farsi simple past tense is made by using the same formula. However, since English is an uninflected language, the simple past tense in this language is formed by using the subject pronoun prior to the simple past form of the verb. Table 4 shows simple past tenses in the three mentioned languages.

Person	*Mazani*	*Farsi*	*English*
First singular	Bakherdemə	Khordam	I ate
Second singular	Bakherdi	Khordi	You ate
Third singular	Bakherdə	Khord	He/she ate
First plural	Bakherdemi	Khordim	We ate
Second plural	Bakherdeni	Khordid	You ate
Third plural	bakherdenə	khordand	They ate

Table 4. Contrastive simple past in Mazani, Farsi and English

Mazandarni's past tense verb endings are {*mə, i, ə, mi, ni, nə*}, respectively. Farsi's past tense verb endings are the same as its present tense verb endings, that is {*am, i, ϕ, im, id, and*}, respectively. The third person singular in Farsi, contrary to Mazandarani, lacks any verb endings.

A special pedagogical implication which can be driven from Tables 2, 3 and 4 is that Mazandarani and Farsi, contrary to English, are gender free and inflected.

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English third person singular: He/ she

Farsi third person singular: Ou

Mazandarani third person singular: və

6.2.2 The past progressive

This tense in all three languages is used to refer to a situation or an action which was going on or was in progress around a particular time in the past.

In English, this tense is formed by using the following formula:

was/ were + verb + ing

(20) He was eating his dinner.

Or: They were playing football.

In Farsi, past progressive is made from simple past, that is by adding suffix *mi* to the beginning of a simple past verb (Ahmadi-Givi & Anvari 2006).

(21) $\underset{suffix}{Mi}\ \underset{simple\ past\ tense}{khordam}$

In Mazandarani, this tense is made by deleting the suffix *ba* from the beginning of a simple past verb.

(22) Bakherdemə → kherdeme

The point in using this tense in Mazandarani and Farsi is that it is usually accompanied by the auxiliary verbs *Däshtan* in Farsi and *Dayyen* in Mazandarani. The meaning of the two verbs is literally "to have/having" in Farsi and "being" in Mazandarani, but their figurative and contextual meanings are both "to be busy with something." Table 5 shows how this tense is made by using these two auxiliary verbs in the three languages.

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Person	*Mazandarani*	*Farsi*	*English*
First singular	Daymə kherdemə	Däshtam mikhordam	I was eating
Second singular	Daymi kherdi	Däshti mikhordi	You was eating
Third singular	Daymə kherdə	Däsht mikhord	He/she eating
First plural	Daymi kherdemi	Däshtim mikhordim	We ware eating
Second plural	Dayni kherdeni	Däshtid mikhordid	You were eating
Third plural	Daynə kherdenə	Däshtand mikhordand	They were eating

Table 5. Contrastive past progressive tense in Mazani, Farsi and English

As it is clear from Table 5 and also the above discussion, Mazandarani and English use the same auxiliary verb (Be = Dayyen) and they are different from Farsi, which makes use of *Däshtan*. Furthermore, there is a clear difference in using verb suffixes (verb endings) between English and the two Iranian languages, that is English, contrary to Farsi and Mazandarani uses the same verb ending (*-ing*) for all persons.

6.2.3 Past perfect tense

This tense is used to refer to an action completed before another action in the past. Below are the formulas for making this tense in English, Farsi and Mazandarani, respectively.

(23) English: (subject) + had + past participle

She had gone.

(24) Farsi: Past participle + inflection of the verb "Budan" (Budam, Budi, Bud. Budim, Budid, Budand)

Be khäne $\underbrace{rafte}_{past\ participle}$Budam. (I had gone home)

(25) Mazandarani: simple past root + inflection of the verb "Biyen" (or Biən)

Bakherd Bimə (I had eaten)

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Person	*Mazani*	*Farsi*	*English*
First singular	Bakherd Bimə	Khordeh Budam	I had eaten
Second singular	Bakherd Bi (or : Bii)	Khordeh Budi	You had eaten
Third singular	Bakherd Biə	Khordeh Bud	He/she had eaten
First plural	Bakherd Bimi	Khordeh Budim	We had eaten
Second plural	Bakherd Bini	Khordeh Budid	You had eaten
Third plural	Bakherd Binə	Khordeh Budand	They had eaten

Table 6. Contrastive past perfect tense in Mazani, Farsi and English

Here, Mazandarani and Farsi are more similar in using the auxiliary verb "be" (*Budan* in Farsi and *Biyen* in Mazandarani) to each other than to English. One more point worth mentioning here is that as with other tenses, since English, contrary to Farsi and Mazandarani, is an uninflected language and there is no verb ending in it to stand for the agent role, the use of subject before the verb is obligatory.

6.3 The future tense

As the name suggests, this tense is used to refer to actions which are going to happen at a definite time in the future. There is a considerable difference between Mazandarani and the two other Languages as far as this tense is concerned. English and Farsi use an auxiliary verb ("will" in English and *khästan* in Farsi) before the main verb to refer to a future action. In Mazandarani, however, we use the simple present tense to refer to a future action. Table 7 summarizes the structures of simple future in Mazandarani, Farsi, and English.

Person	*Mazani*	*Farsi*	*English*
First singular	Shomə	Khäham raft	I will to
Second singular	Shoni	Khähi raft	You will go
Third singular	Shonə	Khähad raft	He/she will go

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First plural	Shomi	Khähim raft	We will go
Second plural	Shonni (or: shoneni)	Khähid raft	You will go
Third plural	Shonne (or: shonenə)	Khähand raft	They will go

Table 7. Simple future in Mazani, Farsi and English

Note that in Farsi, the auxiliary verb *khästan* is conjugated, not the main verb. The formula for making a future tense in Farsi and English are as follows:

Farsi: The inflected form of "khästan" + infinitive without "an".
English: subject + will + infinitive without "to"

Two more points should be taken into consideration. First, contrary to English where the future tense is expressed in different subcategories (such as future perfect, simple future, and future progressive), this tense in both Farsi and Mazandarani is used only in the simple form. Second, in informal Farsi, the simple present tense is usually used in conversations to refer to a future action. In this case, Mazandarani and Farsi are quite similar.

7. Conclusion

In this study, we tried to focus our attention on Mazandarani, Farsi, and English word order, verbs and verb tenses. Some features like passivization of different tenses and different moods like the subjunctive mood were dealt with briefly. The main goal of this study was to compare and contrast the Mazandarani language with Farsi and English in order to take a small step toward introducing this old language internationally and preventing its gradual fading. By contrasting the structure of the above-mentioned three languages, it became clear that given the word order, Mazandarani and Farsi are SOV but English is SVO. Considering verbs and tenses, our study showed that there is a considerable difference between the two Iranian languages and English, particularly in their inflection pattern. While the verb in Mazandarani

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and Farsi are systematically conjugated, in English the verbs are not conjugated in different tenses (except the verb "be").

We hope that the present study paves the way for other scholars who are interested in saving minor groups' dialects as human beings' heritage. Besides, we also hope that it provides pedagogical implications for teachers and syllabus designers to be more equipped in facing students' probable problems and plan for them more systematically.

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