Dialect, ideology and identity in Afghan women refugees of three different generations in Iran

Since 1978 Afghan refugees have fled their country as a consequence of civil unrest and conflict. Millions of these refugees who spoke Dari as a dialect of Persian attempted to seek asylum in Iran where Farsi as another dialect of Persian is spoken. These afghan refugees as a vulnerable community suffering from low socioeconomic status and the feeling of inequality in Iran have been marginalized. In turn, their attitude, perception and the actual use of their mother dialect and culture have changed.

Within this context, the present study aimed to explore how Afghan women of three different generations (first, 1.5 and second) in this refugee context try to negotiate, construct and deconstruct their identities. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select fifteen participants. The first-generation participants included women immigrated into Iran as adults and the second-generation participants were women in their early 20s born in the host country. The 1.5-generation women were selected based on the definition of Rumbaut (2004), referring to children who migrated between the ages of eight and twelve. Semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken to obtain in-depth data on the women refugees' experiences and how their attitude towards maintaining or rejecting their mother dialect to construct their social identity. Discourse analysis of spoken interaction in interviews was also conducted with a focus on phonological variants that give Dari speakers an Afghan accent and those speaking Farsi a Tehrani accent.

Findings from this study demonstrate significant differences among these generations in their attitude and the use of mother dialect due to different reasons including sociopolitical developments in Afghanistan, patriarchal organization of afghan community, the struggle for belongingness and solidarity with their community. Although the attitudes of first and second generation towards their dialect were similar and both generations seek to maintain their dialect and social networks to identify themselves as Afghan, they had different reasons and ways to express their identity. On the contrary, the 1.5 generation expressed an outward-looking identity to distance themselves from Afghan community. These women adopt innovatory variants to sound like Iranians showing a painful struggle for belongingness. The analysis of phonological variants in interview data as salient markers of divergence between these two dialects revealed how their identity and ideology interact in the deployment of particular linguistic practices.

Keywords: dialect maintenance and rejection, identity, ideology, refugees