Identity Construction
The Case of Young Women in Rasht
Padideh Pakpour
Abstract


This study took place in the city of Rasht, which is the capital of Gilan Province, situated in North-Western Iran. The aim has been to investigate how a group of young Rashti women constitute their identities through their talk-in-interaction, and how they relate to the concept of Rashti, be it the dialect, people living in a geographical area, or a notion of collective characteristics. The participants constitute their identities by using different social categories to position and categorise themselves and contrast themselves with others. In positioning and categorising they use various discursive means, such as code-switching, active voicing, and extreme-case formulations. Moreover, the social categories also overlap and work together when the participants negotiate and re-negotiate their identities, making an intersectional approach highly relevant.

The methods used in this study are of a qualitative nature and belong to the third wave of sociolinguistics (Eckert 2012). The analysed data consists primarily of staged conversations, whereas participant observation, field notes, and natural conversations have been used to help the researcher in understanding the field. The study adopts an emic or participants’ perspective through the use of membership categorisation analysis and conversation analysis, but also within a theoretical intersectionality framework.

In many of the examples, the culture of Rasht and Gilan is a re-emerging theme, and it is contrasted with that of the rest of the country. Gender norms and gender roles are very central to the study, as these young women over and over again describe themselves as much freer and less controlled than women in other parts of the country. Gender is made relevant when the participants discuss how the local traditions surpass both national (religious) laws and social codes in other places. The Rashti and Gilaki language varieties also play a role in the constructing of the Rashti identity of the participants. There is, however, a discrepancy between the participants’ values vis-à-vis Rashti and Gilaki as a dialect or a language, and how they value being a Rashti as well as Rashti and Gilaki culture. In the majority of conversations the participants expressed a highly positive opinion as to their backgrounds as Rashtis, while at the same time the Rashti and Gilaki language varieties were mostly valued in very negative ways.

**Keywords:** Iran, Rasht, intersectionality, sociolinguistics, identity, membership categorisation analysis, social categories, language norms

*Padideh Pakpour, Department of Linguistics and Philology, Box 635, Uppsala University, SE-75126 Uppsala, Sweden.*

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ISSN 1100-326X
ISBN 978-91-554-9298-4
urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-259613 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-259613)

Printed in Sweden by Kph Trycksaksbolaget, Uppsala 2015
To my grandmother Hajieh Rastegar Gigsari,
my parents Ali Pakpour and Fati Safaei,
my brother Pedram Pakpour,
and to the Rashti people
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I would like to start by thanking my family for their support and help over the years: my grandmother Hajieh Rastegar Gigasari, who taught me a woman must always make her own money and be independent, and who welcomed me into her home every time I visited Iran even though I would turn her entire flat upside-down and spread books and papers all over the place and turn it into jome bazar. I would like to thank my father who taught me that I can conquer the world, not despite the fact that I am a girl, but because of it, and my mother who is my best friend and role model, and who puts up with my constant rantings and temper tantrums. Your patience and kindness seem to have no limits, and I have no idea how you put up with me at times. I would also like to thank my brother who is five years younger, but fifty years wiser than I, and who has encouraged me to find my own paths. You will forever be the greatest source of joy and pride in my life. The best journey is still the one we did together, and I hope there will be more to come, hopefully this time in Central Asia. I also want to thank my lovely uncle Hamid Safaei, and my four wonderful cousins here in Sweden, Tina Hosseinpour, Monika Safaei, Helen Safaei, and Melody Safaei. Thank you for your support, dinners, drinks, endless jokes and laughters, and occasional visits to the movies. It has been a great way of getting away from all the work to relax for a couple of hours.

At the department I would like to thank my wonderful supervisor Carina Jahani, who stood by my side when I needed her the most, and encouraged me in my darkest moments. It has been a pleasure and an honor to work with you, and your humility and generosity are qualities we all should aspire to. I would also like to thank my supervisor Nigel Musk, who turned up when I needed him the most. It has been a true pleasure to come to the office every single day for the past year, and words cannot express how grateful I am. Working with you has made me grow as a person and as a researcher, and I had no idea being criticized could actually be this fun. I also need to thank Helena Bani-Shoraka for her input.

I want to thank my colleagues Guiti Shokri, Maryam Nourzaei, Forogh Hashabeiky, Behrooz Barjasteh Delforooz, Esmat Esmaeili, Mojgan Seraji, Alexander Nilsson, Aynur Aibixi, Vera Wilhelmsen, Jakob Andersson, Inga-Lill Holmberg, and Helena Löthman, for your help, kind words and encouragement.
at the office. A special thanks to Moa Ekborn, who spent an entire hour listening to me when I thought I had reached my lowest point, and was about to lose my mind. Another special thanks goes to the late Dariush Kargar who listened and gave great advice when I needed it. You will always be missed.

There are also so many friends who have stood by my side during these seven years and who have kept in touch when I have not. Anna and Omar Ud-Din, who have been patient and made me feel better by forcing me to join in at BBQs, dinners, and coffee breaks. Also, thank you for taking care of my flat and Tesla, when I have been away. Thank you Sara Karlsson for making me laugh, getting along with Tesla and looking after her when I have been out travelling. A huge thank you to Sonja Mardan Beigi for keeping me company when I needed to get out and have a beer or two. It is truly a blessing to find someone with the same cynical spirit – may it never change. I also wish to thank Noelia Ljuslinder, Aina Ahari, Madelene Segelöv, Aydin Ghayour, Viveca Andersson, and Jaana Ohranen who continue to keep in touch when I fall off the grid and disappear into my own little bubble. Thank you for the lunches, dinners, champagne, and concerts.

To those of my friends whom I have neglected terribly or who live far away, Carl-Johan Berggren, Victoria Arutunian, Susan Salimi, Viktor Carlsson, Johanna Voxberg, Sascha Völlmin, Bree Romuld, Elisa Hansen, Hanna Nygren, Maria Steenmark, Benjamin Jiglund, Angelo Hagberg, Lorin Ibrahim Berzincî, Hanna Grenerfors, Marmar Moshfeghi, Charles Björklund, Rut Persson, Angelnette Nordqvist, Dani Gehrmann, Alex Malcolm, Liina Lindström, Forogh Daneshpip, Patricia Marino, and Akash Dao. I am so grateful that you still remember me, and I hope to see more of you now that it is all over. Your support and kind words have meant the world to me. I would also like to thank the Internet site www.viki.com, that has provided me with subbed Korean TV shows when I needed to get away from all the books.

During the past 10 years I have gone back and forth to Iran, and there have been so many people who have helped with my research in different ways. This work would not have been possible without the help of my unclesNosrollah Pakpour, Mohammad-Reza Pakpour, Hossein Safaei, and Hassan Safaei, and my aunts Madar Pakpour, Zeynab Pakpour, Robabeh Pakpour, Kolsom Safaei, Farrangis Safaei, Farideh Safaei, and their families, who have opened their homes to me, and always made me feel welcome. I would also like to thank my numerous cousins; it has been great to be able to go back to Iran after all these years and basically pick up where we left off when I left the country at the age of 7. All of you have made me feel so welcome and so loved; the memories will stay with me forever. I wish to thank my cousin Ahmad Pakpour, as well as my bonus uncles Mr Saabet and Mehran Mousavian, for driving me around when I needed to get
in touch with participants. Also to my parents’ friends, Mohsen Golchin, Mohtaram Sadrolzakerin, Reza Golchin, Fatemeh Hariri, Nasrin Bizargiti, Maryam Akhavan, Nahid Rahmati, and their lovely families for always welcoming me into their homes. I have loved getting in touch with all of you again after all these years.

I also wish to thank Agnes Korn and Christian Rammer for their help with the maps in this book, and the Helge Ax:son Johnson Foundation, Summer Institute of Linguistics International, and the faculty of languages at Uppsala University for financial aid.

Last but not least I have to thank those who have made this thesis possible with their advice on how to understand Iranian society, and helping me to get in touch with participants, i.e. the ladies at the NGO, Parnian Babaei, Mr Gholami, Khaneye Farhang and Mr Khanjayi who welcomed me to the Wednesday writing classes, and Monir Jafarpour and her daughter Niloofar Ziayi. A special thanks to all of my friends in Iran who so readily offered their friendship and made my visits to Iran and Rasht so memorable: Elham Kohani, Shahab Ahmadpour, Raha Fatahi, Rozita Rajae, Ali Jafari, Armin Majidzadeh, Nina Golestani, Milad Reyhani, Arash Talebi, Keysan Jalilian, Mahsan Seighalani, Elaheh Hemmati, Reza Omidi, Mehdi and Mohammad Naderi, Soheil La’l, Azadeh Shamshadi, Mehrdad, Morteza and Babak Golchin, Afshar Raof, Susan Sadr, Pooya Ma’de-lat, and Sadaf and Malahat Kasmapour.

Needless to say, a million thanks to the young men and women who agreed to meet me and be a part of this study. I wish I could name all of you, but well, ethical considerations and all that. Thank you for being so welcoming and sharing your lives with me, and giving me the chance to get acquainted with the city I left behind so long ago. It was at times overwhelming but I enjoyed every second I got to spend with you. Also thank you for putting up with all the questions, and with me sticking an audio-recorder in your faces on all occasions. This study could never have been possible, had all of you not agreed to do this with me, even though I know it seemed odd to some of you that I would come all the way to Iran to conduct this kind of research. Thank you for the picnics, the mountain climbing, the laughter, driving around Golsar every Thursday and Friday evening, taking me to cafés and restaurants, joining me at the movies, giving of your time and resources, the conversations and discussions, and all the happy memories.
Transcription key

The first table includes a key to the transliteration conventions for the examples in chapter 5–7. The transcriptions in this study are based on spoken language, and not written language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>IPA symbol, description, English approximation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ā</td>
<td>gilān</td>
<td>/ɒ/ back rounded open vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>fard</td>
<td>/ɐ/ central spread near open vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>jeddi</td>
<td>/e/ front spread close mid vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>birun</td>
<td>/i/ front spread close vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>șol</td>
<td>/o/ short back rounded close mid vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ō</td>
<td>mōzu</td>
<td>/oː/ long back rounded close mid vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>miduni</td>
<td>/u/ back rounded close vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q</td>
<td>bāq, qalam</td>
<td>/ɣ/ voiced uvular fricative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>xune</td>
<td>/x/ voiceless uvular fricative as in <strong>Loch</strong> (Scottish English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ŕ</td>
<td>rašt</td>
<td>/ʃ/ voiceless alveo-palatal fricative as in <strong>short</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>č</td>
<td>bače</td>
<td>/ʧ/ voiceless alveo-palatal affricate as in <strong>charm</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>rōj</td>
<td>/ʒ/ voiced alveo-palatal fricative as in <strong>vision</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>jāleb</td>
<td>/dʒ/ voiced alveo-palatal affricate as in <strong>jazz</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The symbols in this second table show various features of their speech production, such as cut offs, overlapping speech, or loudness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:</td>
<td>mōzu:</td>
<td>Colon: elongated previous sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>I (.) went on</td>
<td>Pause: No consideration has been taken regarding the length of the pause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>I (x) well</td>
<td>Inaudible speech or unclear fragment. Each x corresponds to one word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>° ° °</td>
<td>° and °</td>
<td>Degree signs: noticeably quieter than surrounding speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>{   }</td>
<td>{and}</td>
<td>Curly brackets: happy or chuckling voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and</td>
<td>Italic: code-switching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>weath-</td>
<td>Dash: cut-offs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>a[nd then</td>
<td>Square brackets between adjacent lines: overlapping speech between different participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[he did not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man raftam</td>
<td>I went</td>
<td>Words in bold: translation of line above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

‘What was the book, Cal?’ I asked.
‘Blackstone Commentaries.’
Jem was thunderstruck. ‘You mean you taught Zeebo outa that?’
‘Why yes sir, Mister Jem.’ Calpurnia timidly put her fingers to her mouth. ‘They were the only books I had. Your granddaddy said Mr Blackstone wrote fine English –’
‘That’s why you don’t talk like the rest of ’em,’ said Jem.
‘The rest of who?’
‘Rest of the coloured folks, Cal, but you talked like they did in church…’
That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her having command of two languages.
‘Cal,’ I asked ‘why do you talk nigger-talk to the – to your folks when you know it’s not right?’
‘Well, in the first place I’m black –’
‘That doesn’t mean you hafta talk that way when you know better,’ said Jem. Calpurnia tilted her hat and scratched her head, then pressed her hat down carefully over her ears. ‘It’s right hard to say,’ she said. ‘Suppose you and Scout talked coloured-folks’ talk at home – it’d be out of place, wouldn’t it? Now what if I talked white-folks’ talk at church, and with my neighbours? They’d think I was puttin’ on airs to beat Moses.’
‘But Cal, you know better,’ I said.
‘It’s not necessary to tell all you know. It’s not lady-like – in the second place, folks don’t like to have somebody around knowin’ more than they do. It aggravates ‘em. You’re not gonna change any of them by talkin’ right, they’ve got to want to learn themselves, and when they don’t want to learn there’s nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language.’

_To Kill a Mockingbird_ – Harper Lee

1.1. Background

Being born and partially raised in Rasht during the 1980s, I grew up in an environment where my grandparents, uncles, aunts, parents and their friends would speak Rashti to each other, but only Persian to me and my cousins. At the age of 7, I and my family moved to Sweden and we went from being a bilingual to a
multilingual family. My parents continued speaking Rashti to each other, and Persian to my brother and me, while my brother and I soon switched to only speaking Swedish to each other, until it became our first language. This occurred much against my father’s will, who insisted on us keeping our mother tongue Persian alive in our home and daily communication, and sending us to Persian classes whenever it was possible. Interestingly, there was never any pressure from my parents for us to learn Rashti, even though it was their mother tongue, and they did not acquire Persian until they started school. Looking back, the fact that my parents, like many other parents in their generation, abandoned the Rashti dialect in favour of Persian when talking to their children seems to be something of a non-issue, a matter everyone knows about but does not ponder upon or discuss. Nevertheless, growing up in an environment where Rashti was used on a daily basis, both my brother and I understood it, even though we never spoke it. He still does not speak it, while I have started to use the dialect during the last three years, mostly when I speak to my grandmother but on a few occasions also with my parents. This is still so new to me that the first time my father spoke to me in Rashti, I assumed he was addressing my mother and did not reply.

When asking my parents about this as a grown-up, the only explanation I got was that “it’s because everyone did that”. The closest to a deeper explanation was that Rashti people would be ridiculed in the media and by other Iranians, when speaking Rashti or Persian with a Rashti accent. Interestingly this is not limited to Iran, but can be detected in the Iranian community in Sweden as well. I recall one time at an Iranian party when my mother got annoyed with another guest who asked my mother which city she was from. When my mother replied Rasht, the other woman said something in terms of “Oh I guessed Rasht. I could hear it from your accent.” For many this might sound like an innocent comment, but for someone familiar with Iranian society, it would be perceived as the other woman belittling my mother. This is the way my mother also perceived it, and talked about it on our way home.

At the same time, throughout my childhood and as a grown-up I have been told by the majority of the Rashti people I have met how much better Gilan is compared to the rest of the country, how much more open-minded Rashtis are, and how much freer Rashti women are, despite the current laws and regulations restricting women all over the country. Two reasons have been given for this “superior” Rashti identity. One has been the city’s and Gilan Province’s connection and relation to Russia and Europe that has been enabled through the Caspian Sea. I have been told that not only has the Sea enabled trade, but also led to ideas and social reforms entering Gilan. The second reason has been that the Arabs did not manage to conquer the province until some three centuries after they occupied the
rest of Iran, and also that the Arabs, and consequently Islam, never truly managed to enter Gilan and influence its people and their way of thinking and behaving.

This dual attitude of the people I have met has been fascinating. On the one hand, they speak about the Gilaks and Rashti people having a superior and more open-minded culture, expressed especially through their pragmatic and relaxed approach to religion and the higher position of women compared to the rest of the country. On the other hand, there is a negative attitude towards the Gilaki language and the Rashti dialect, as they seem to be so ashamed of their vernacular that the majority of parents nowadays have decided to neglect passing it on to their children. This is interesting as language has long been considered a crucial part of a people’s culture.

Gilaki society has undergone some major changes in the last century. One of these has been the process of language shift, which has been the result of urbanisation and central government policies. During the 1950s and 1960s, an urbanisation process started to take place in Gilan, resulting in increased access to education and the media. In combination with the Pahlavi Dynasty’s focus on the Persian language as the national language of Iran, the Gilaki language has become more and more influenced by Persian, resulting in city varieties such as the Rashti or Lahijani dialects with features from both Persian and Gilaki.

1.2. Aims and purposes

This thesis belongs to the field of sociolinguistics, whose interdisciplinary character is rooted in its combination of studies within both the humanities and social sciences. In discussions with the participants it became apparent that they use different social categories, such as age, gender, and social class, when constructing their identity as Rashtis, which has made an intersectional perspective central to this study. Intersectionality is a concept where identity is believed to be created through the overlapping of different social categories.

The aim of this study is to investigate how a group of young Rashti women define their unique identity. This includes investigating how different social categories overlap and work together when the participants negotiate and re-negotiate their identities. Apart from examining what social categories the participants use when defining their identities, it also means investigating what other groups they contrast themselves with in their identity construction. It is important to keep in mind that this study makes no attempt to represent all young Rashti women, but rather it is the opinions of the participants that are in focus.
The question formulations in this study are as follows:

- What aspects are highlighted by the participants in the construction of their identities?
- What discursive means are used by the participants in the service of identity construction?
- What social categories do the participants make relevant in their conversations, and how do these categories interplay in the construction of a Rashti identity?
- What social categories are made relevant when the participants discuss the Rashti and Gilaki language varieties?

1.3. Structure of the study

This study consists of eight chapters, and is organized in the following manner: Chapter 2 sets out the theoretical premises of the thesis and situates it within the sociolinguistic field and its three waves. This chapter also concerns social identities, as they play a central role both in the sociolinguistic field in general, as well as in this specific study. As the standpoint of this study is that identities become interesting when one examines them through the intersection of various social categories, the analytical concept of intersectionality will also be introduced to the reader in chapter 2. Identities and group membership are essential parts of this study, and as talk is the focus of the analysis here, conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA) have been important analytical approaches. Identities are made relevant when speakers use different discursive means to position, categorise, and contrast themselves vis-à-vis others. All of these approaches and discursive means will be presented to the reader in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 deals with the data collection procedure and the methods used as part of the fieldwork in Rasht, such as participant observation and staged and natural conversations. This chapter familiarises the reader with the role of the researcher, the researcher’s access to the field and the challenges faced in the field, and provides a discussion regarding ethical considerations. There is a section concerning how the data has been dealt with, that is to say, transcribed, translated and analysed. Chapter 3 provides a short presentation of the participants, with a longer presentation in Appendix 1.

The purpose of chapter 4 is to introduce the historical, cultural, and linguistic background of Gilan Province and its provincial capital, Rasht. It deals with the
status of the Gilaki language and the Rashti dialect compared to the Persian language, which is the official language of Iran. There is also a section concerning the language policy of Iran, emphasizing the roles of the Pahlavi Dynasty and the Islamic Republic, as they have laid the foundation for contemporary language policies and values.

The study consists of three analytical chapters, each regarding different aspects of the Rashti identity. Chapter 5 concerns how the participants evaluate and speak about the Gilaki and Rashti language varieties. Language itself is not a social category, but there are various social categories the participants raise when discussing speakers of different varieties, as well as the category-bound attributes and activities they link to the different groups of speakers. For example, the participants highlight how the social categories of gender and class intersect with language.

Chapter 6 concerns geography, and here the participants discuss the geographical position of Gilan Province, with a focus on how the Caspian Sea and the Alborz Mountain Range have influenced a Gilaki/Rashti identity. In this chapter, the participants also bring up communication with Russians and Europeans, which has been made possible through the Caspian Sea. When the participants speak about their Rashti identity, it becomes evident that it consists of two parts. First it consists of being born (and raised) in Rasht, but just as important is how the participants discuss the characteristics and features of being Rashti. The second part is a set of specific characteristics and features the participants connect to being Rashti.

The final analysis chapter concerns the social category of gender. The focus of chapter 7 is on the participants discussing how Rashti, and to some extent Gilaki, women and men are different from women and men in the rest of the country. This means that the participants primarily discuss the regional gender norms and contrast them with those of other parts of Iran. Apart from gender, other social categories such as religion and age are brought up, which in combination with gender constitute a unique Rashti identity, according to the participants. The participants contrast Rashti women, and to a lesser extent Rashti men, with women and men in other cities in three ways: first through the significance of appearance, second through Rashti women’s presence in public spaces and their interaction with people of the opposite sex, and finally though the freedom Rashti girls and women enjoy thanks to Rashti men.

The final chapter of this study consists of concluding discussions, reflections and a summary. It deals with the discursive means used by the participants in the construction of a Rashti identity, as well as discussing the identity of other groups which the participants contrast themselves with. As intersectionality is a central
approach in this study, chapter 8 attempts to bring together the various social categories which have been made relevant by the participants in chapters 5–7, in order to show how the intersection and combination of these categories constitute a Rashti identity.

Appendix 1, functions as an introduction to the participants. There is also a second Appendix consisting of the subjects and questions discussed by the participants in the staged conversations.
2. Theoretical approaches

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical premises of this thesis are introduced. In section 2.2. the reader is presented with developments in the sociolinguistic field, with focus on the three waves of sociolinguistics presented by Eckert and the works of Gumperz and Goffman, as they have been influential in the development of sociolinguistics. Section 2.3. presents the notion of social identities, and their central role in the sociolinguistic field with regard to how people co-construct social identities and social categories to define themselves and others. Section 2.4. deals with some sociolinguistic and ethnographic studies conducted in Iran, and the following section 2.5., functions as an introduction to CA and MCA. As the participants use positioning and categorisation in their speech when discussing themselves and other groups in society, 2.6. discusses these concepts. The participants also use various discursive means when they position and categorise themselves and others in the staged discussions, and therefore the discursive means are dealt with in 2.7. Various approaches and theories are presented in this chapter, making it important to clarify the theoretical approach of this study, which is the topic of section 2.8.

2.2. Developments in the sociolinguistic field and interactional sociolinguistics

This sections concerns the different waves of sociolinguistics as presented by Eckert, as well as providing an introduction to the researchers who have shaped and influenced the field of interactional sociolinguistics.

2.2.1. The three waves of sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is a fairly young discipline, dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, and it came into existence after scholars such as Gumperz and Hymes (1972), Labov (1963, 1972), Fishman (1971), and Halliday (1978) among others believed there to be a need for an understanding of what language can do communicatively
and socially. They also saw limitations to the study of language when the social and contextual bases were not taken into consideration.

Sociolinguistics is an approach that combines the fields of sociology, linguistics, and anthropology. The combination of fields is also what makes sociolinguistics an interdisciplinary research field between the humanities and the social sciences. Even though sociolinguistics is a young research field, it has undergone changes with shifting priorities. Eckert (2012) presents three waves within sociolinguistic research and linguistic variation during the last five decades. Each of these waves represents different methods and models of analysis. However, studies belonging to the different waves do not necessarily come in chronological order, and none of these waves replaces a prior one; rather each wave should be considered as a development within the field, and all three waves are much alive. This means that in contemporary research it is possible to find features from prior waves. According to Drummond and Schleef (forthcoming) identity has been focused on since early 1960s, but it is the role identity has played in explaining language change and variation that has changed over time.

The first wave is dominated by quantitative methods with many informants. The studies are conducted in specific places and the researcher is interested in linguistic variables, and to study the link between linguistic variables and demographic categories such as ethnicity, age, class, and gender (Eckert 2012: 87). Studies focus on identifying variation, examining the social and linguistic restrictions on the variation, and see if the variation is a reflection of language change or not (Drummond and Schleef forthcoming). Identity is hardly ever theorised or even mentioned in the first wave studies, and the closest one might come to a discussion regarding identity are social categories, which are seen as factors in statistical testings (Drummond and Schleef forthcoming). One of the studies that can be placed in the first wave is Labov’s (1966) study *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. This inspired several other studies with a large number of informants carried out in urban milieus in the 1960s and 1970s, with specific awareness of the occurrence of, e.g. phonological variation (Wolfram 1969, Trudgill 1974, Maculay 1977). These studies establish a pattern of socioeconomic stratification, showing regional and ethnic differentiation and a greater use of nonstandard linguistic forms. The studies in the first wave focus on macrosociological categories, and speakers are seen as bundles of demographic characteristics. Apart from socioeconomic hierarchies, gender stratification is also the aim of some studies (Eckert 2012: 88–89).

Another of Labov’s works, *Language in the Inner City – Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (1972), belonging to the first wave, helps establish that Afri-
can American Vernacular English is not simply slang, but rather a set of pronunciation rules, capable of conveying complex logic and reasoning. It shows Black vernacular as a separate and independent dialect of English. Through his early works Labov gained recognition, which enabled him to make sociolinguistics an important part of linguistic studies.

One explanation of the differences between how men and women choose what language to use and how they evaluate language in relation to status can be found, for example, in Trudgill’s (1974) study, *The Social Differentiation of English in Norwich*. Trudgill notices that women are more aware of status and the social significance of linguistic variables than men are. The relationship between men and women in society is unbalanced, and women have a less secure position and are subordinate to men. Whereas women are judged by the way they appear, men are evaluated by their occupation and their abilities, which makes it more necessary for women to signal social status linguistically. Trudgill also concludes that working class speech has connotations of masculinity and is associated with roughness and toughness, which are desirable masculine attributes, whereas for women it is more desirable to be sophisticated and refined.

The second wave, also known as the ethnographic approach, focuses more on local dynamics of variation. There is a greater focus on the vernacular as a sign of local and class identity, and the studies seek to reveal the relevance of macrosociological categories, as well as the connection between these categories and the use of linguistic variables. Here researchers study smaller areas, so-called speech communities, using ethnographic methods for data collection (Eckert 2012: 90–91). Conducting ethnographic studies, researchers try to discover locally prominent social categories, rather than presupposing them. Social categories are seen as a result of their place in social practices, and give a more distinct image of how individuals’ different ways of talking are encoded with local meaning.

The methods in the second wave themselves are not necessarily qualitative; it is rather the way in which the researcher uses them that determines whether the methods generate quantitative or qualitative data. This means that there are qualitative and non-qualitative observations, interviews, text analyses etc. One of the methods within the ethnographic field is participant observation, which can be conducted through various degrees of participation, interviews, and taking field notes (Aspers 2010: 103). The studies are often longitudinal, and like in the first wave they aim to discover linguistic variables. The ethnographic studies in the second wave add a local perspective to the studies and provide a link between macrosociological categories and local categories (Eckert 2012: 93). Since the studies in the second wave, as in the first wave, focus on quantitative results, the underlying assumption is that identities are fixed and stable. Even though the view
on identity had not changed much between the first and second wave, identity moved to centre stage and vernaculars were seen as reflections on identity in the second wave (Drummond and Schleef forthcoming). Studies conducted in accordance with this second wave are, among others, Labov’s work in Martha’s Vineyard (1963), Gal’s 1979 study in Austria, and Eckert’s study of “Jocks” and “Burnouts” at a high school in Detroit (1989).

On the basis of interviews and ethnographic observation, Labov (1963) establishes that some speakers in Martha’s Vineyard were reversing their speech in order to recapture the distinct island dialect. The new pronunciation was an innovation, but as more people came to speak in the same way, the innovation became the norm for those living on the island and was after some time established as a dialect. Even though this study is conducted before Labov’s studies in 1966 and 1972, it can be placed in the second wave as it is a quantitative ethnographic study of variation. In the early 1960s Martha’s Vineyard was a community where an increasing number of tourists threatened the local fishing economy. This caused the fishermen to oppose the intrusion from the mainland, but there were also those who benefited from the money tourism brought. Labov finds that people use phonological variables as a symbol in the conflict over the island’s future, and his study focuses on the local identity of the Vineyarders.

A similar study where language use is linked to how people view opportunities in a bigger society was conducted by Gal in the late 1970s. Gal (1979) studies the Hungarian-German bilingual village of Oberwart in Austria. Gal’s study deals with the language shift from Hungarian-German bilingualism to German monolingualism among the young women in the small community of Oberwart. The Hungarian language was here a symbol of the hard life of farm-work, and the strict and traditional values of peasant culture, while speaking German was a way to get away from all of that and move up the social ladder. For young women, this could be achieved by marrying young working men who were (or at least appeared and declared themselves to be) monolingual German speaking. In her work, Gal found that the youngest generation of Hungarians, and specifically young women, were shifting to speaking almost exclusively German.

Explaining the psychology behind people’s choice of language, Gal suggests that language shift symbolises changes in the status and gender roles of the speakers and their shifting values associated with the language they first use and the language they shift to. Gal’s study is placed in the second wave as it differs from Labov’s even though they both examine linguistic shift processes; Gal finds that the shift is going towards the high standard language, while Labov’s study shows that young men use a centralised pronunciation of diphthongs to try to identify themselves as native Vineyarders, thereby rejecting the values and speech style of
the mainland, especially since they resent the influx of wealthy summer visitors. This causes the creation of a linguistic divide between them and us. Features from both studies can be found in this thesis, for example when the participants speak about Rashti women being attracted to standard-prestige speech, which is Persian. Another feature can be found when the participants discuss Gilaki and Rashtí and link them to peasant culture and a decrease in status, whereas Persian is closely linked to high social status, class, and prestige.

Another ethnographic study which concerns class and status was carried out by Eckert (1989) among adolescents in high schools in a predominantly white suburban area in Detroit, where the students were involved in two opposing social categories, the middle class “Jocks”, representing the leading crowd of the schools, and the working class “Burnouts”, representing the rebellious crowd. The study aims to explore various aspects of social identity and social polarisation between the class-based social categories Jocks and Burnouts, as these two groups are the basis of the social organisation of the high-school and the individuals’ understanding of identity within this community. Eckert’s study is not only about the differences between these two groups of adolescents, but also about how these differences link the Jocks and Burnouts together, and how they compete and cooperate as they define their community and peer group. According to Eckert, the polarisation between Jocks and Burnouts results in people being thrown into choosing between two set patterns of behaviour. This leads children from different socioeconomic statuses into different roles in adolescence, which also prepares them for their places in adult society. The roles of members of the two different groups ultimately reflect their parents’ roles in the adult community (Eckert 2012: 91–93).

An ethnographic study which is primarily concerned with language shift and language maintenance processes, was conducted by Del Torto (2008) in Canada. Her work focuses on intergenerational family language use, language contact, language shift and maintenance among three generations of Canadian-Italians in Border City, Ontario, as well as ideologies and identities linked to these linguistic phenomena. The sociolinguistic importance of this study is what it tells us about the pressures, processes, and outcomes of language shift and maintenance in a multigenerational immigrant community. The social category of generation is of great importance in this investigation, and Del Torto focuses on the language contact situation at a stage of generational language shift, whereby the oldest living generation is dominant in Italian, their children are mainly bilingual, and the third generation uses almost solely English. Some of the informants see their roots as being enough foundation for belonging, especially the third generation inform-
nants, while others view the ability to use the language in combination with heritage and culture as being needed in order to claim Italianness. Especially the second generation informants refer to language when establishing their position as “more Italian” than the younger generation, but “more Canadian” that the first generation informants. Their roots are, however, seen as a treasure, and many of the third generation informants claim Italianness despite their lack of usage of the Italian language.

Even though these four studies are similar in some ways, there are also differences. While Labov and Gal are mainly concerned with linguistic changes, Eckert’s and Del Torto’s studies also consider the issues of identity and group membership.

In the third wave, the stylistic perspective, the focus has moved from quantitative to qualitative studies using small numbers of informants and ethnographic methods. While the first and second waves see the meaning of variation as “incidental fallout from social space”, the third wave sees variation as a crucial aspect of language (Eckert 2012: 94). The move from the first wave to the third has completely changed how the relationship between language and society is viewed. While in the first two waves variation is seen as saying the same thing in different ways, the third wave places ideology in language, and in the construction of meaning (Eckert 2012: 98). In regard to identities, language is not perceived as reflecting them, but as creating them with the help of stylistic practices (Eckert 2012: 94). This means that focus is moved to the social meaning of variables and the role language plays in the constitution of identities.

Within the third wave, identities are seen as changeable and dynamic, and they can be established and re-established (Drummond and Schleef forthcoming). Bucholtz (1999a: 210) shows how, in these studies, the question of social identity is important, and individual actions are considered as personal choices rather than the result of predetermined structured social order. The studies are micro oriented and the speakers’ perspective is central when studying language. Speech communities are replaced by much smaller and more flexible “communities of practice” (Eckert 2012: 93–96). A community of practice can be described as “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour” (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 1992: 464). The studies aim to show how different social identities are co-constructed in interaction, but also how language usage correlates with other social parameters. A major difference between earlier sociolinguistic approaches and the third wave is that social contexts and active participation are given a higher degree of significance as the underlying explanations for linguistic variation in the third wave (Eckert 2012: 93–96).
Examples of studies belonging to the third wave are Bucholtz (1999a) where teenage girls position themselves as “geeks” in contrast to the dominating norms, Bucholtz (1999b) where teenage boys renegotiate gender and race, and Mendoza-Denton (1996), studying identity markers among Latin-American female gangs. In the third wave of sociolinguistics, smaller groups of informants, an emic perspective, and a deeper study of the participants when interacting with one another are in focus. In the study Ungdomars dagliga interaktion. En språkvetenskaplig studie av sex gymnasieungdomars bruk av tal, skrift och interaktionsmedier¹, Bellander (2010) examines how young people interact through a variety of media, and how their language usage varies depending on context. Bellander’s investigation also sheds light on how young people interact and how they relate to each other in any given situation. Bellander examines three explanations as to how the language of individuals is influenced. First, she studies how activities, i.e. the social context, influence the language use of individuals. Second, she investigates how the influence of technical characteristics of the media shape language use. Finally, Bellander studies the extent to which variables such as gender, interests, networks, and social and ethnic background affect language use.

Although Eckert (2012) speaks about there being different waves within the sociolinguistic field, they should not be seen as entirely separate from one another when conducting a study. Rather, features from each wave can be found in a study, depending on how the researcher wishes to organize his/her work. Eckert describes the third wave as characterized by qualitative studies containing a small number of informants using ethnographic methods, an emic perspective, the focus on social identity co-constructed in interaction, social context as one explanation of linguistic variation, and language use correlating with other social parameters. As many of these features can be found in this study, it can be placed within the third wave of sociolinguistics.

### 2.2.2. Influential ideas on social interaction

As mentioned in 2.2.1. context came to play a significant role within the third wave of sociolinguistics, as scholars began to realize that there are features of language that go beyond those described in dictionaries and grammars. Even though context became important in the third wave of sociolinguistics, these ideas emerged beforehand, and two scholars who paved the way for this type of research were Gumperz and Goffman. Goffman was a sociologist and anthropologist, who from the 1950s onwards studied human interaction in social relations,

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¹ Young people’s everyday interaction. A sociolinguistic study of six upper secondary school adolescents' use of speech, writing and interactive media.
as well as social identities, even though his work did not have any specific lin-
guistic orientation. A more linguistic approach was introduced by Gumperz, a lin-
guist and anthropologist, who at the beginning of the 1980s started emphasizing
the importance of context.

Gumperz illustrated how sociocultural knowledge is embedded in talk and be-
behaviour, rather than just embedded in beliefs and judgments existing outside in-
teraction. According to Gumperz people use contextualisation cues to communi-
cate rapidly shifting interpretative frames. Contextualisation cues can be ex-
plained as “the means by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the
activity is, how semantic content is to be understood and how each sentence re-
lates to what precedes or follows” (Gumperz 1982a: 131). Contextualisation cues
vary according to semiotic mode, but may include prosody, code and lexical
choice, sequencing choices, formulaic expressions and gestural phenomena. Their
function is to cue a framework for understanding the meaning of utterances that
might otherwise be ambiguous (Bailey 2008: 2315).

Goffman’s approach to social interaction complements Gumperz’s approach
to the situated creation of meaning, and regarding social interaction, Goffman
concluded:

In any society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises,
it seems that a system of practices, conventions, and procedural rules comes
into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of
messages. […] The conventions regarding the structure of occasions of talk
represent an effective solution to the problem of organizing a flow of spoken
messages. In attempting to discover how it is that these conventions are main-
tained in force as guides to action, one finds evidence to suggest a functional
relationship between the structure of the self and the structure of spoken inter-
action (Goffman 1955: 239, 240).

Goffman considered individual identities as social constructions created through
interaction with others. In his analysis of the relationship between interpersonal
meaning and social construction, Goffman takes into consideration the symbolic
value of what is said and done as more abstract forms of social life. By analysing
form and meaning in detail it becomes possible to understand how conversational
participants perceive the context. The participants use their interpretation of the
context as they simultaneously construct it through their conversation (Goffman
1956: 1–2).

According to Schiffrin, there are two central aspects uniting Goffman and
Gumperz, thus building a base for interactional sociolinguistics, namely “the in-
teraction between self and other, and context” (Schiffrin 1994: 105). Goffman and
Gumperz both emphasize context and believe it to play a crucial role in how a
statement is interpreted. It is context that enables conversational participants to come to a conclusion about how to interpret and understand a statement (Anderson 2009: 34). This ability is important since it involves using previous contextual knowledge, the goal of the interaction, and the relationships between the conversational participants.

Goffman nor Gumperz have strongly influenced the third wave, which is very much concerned with social identity on a micro level. This study is also concerned with these specific matters, as it conducts micro-level analyses and aims to show the importance of context and interpretation when the participants discuss social identity and social groups in their interaction with one another. The following section concerns research conducted in the sociolinguistic and ethnographic fields conducted in Iran.

2.3. Sociolinguistic and ethnographic research conducted in Iran

This section presents three studies conducted in Iran. Bani-Shoraka (2005), Shahidi (2008), and Khosravi (2008) have conducted research in the fields of sociolinguistics and ethnography. While the first two concern language choice patterns that can also be detected in Gilan and Rasht, Khosravi focuses on modern, young middle-class Tehranis and how they construct their identity in relation to other groups in society. While these studies adopt either a sociolinguistic or an ethnographic perspective, my research attempts to combine these two perspectives in order to gain a deeper understanding of the Rashti identity of my participants.

One sociolinguistic study performed in Iran is Bani-Shoraka’s work (2005) where she examines language choice and code-switching patterns in the Azerbaijani community in Tehran (Iran). Bani-Shoraka finds that an on-going language shift process is taking place in this speech community, from Azerbaijani–Persian bilingualism to Persian monolingualism. The rate of this process is due to a number of social factors, such as age, level of education, and neighbourhood, even though Bani-Shoraka believes a total language shift to be unlikely as there is strong demographic support within the community. Also, there is a movement working for the revitalisation of the Azerbaijani language and culture opposing the ongoing process of language shift.

Shahidi (2008) examines the language shift situation in Mazandaran (Iran) in a sociolinguistic study, based on a survey using the apparent-time method. The goal of her study is to examine the current situation of Mazandarani as a declining language, but also to show how speakers in the specific situation act as catalysts
in the process of language shift. As Mazandarani is undergoing Persianisation, Shahidi has based the empirical research on an analysis of the effects of language shift on Mazandarani syntax, morphology, phonology, lexicon, and semantics, and compared them with colloquial and standard Persian, in order to find Persian influence and its impact on this Iranian minority language. She has also investigated both synchronic and diachronic settings, speakers’ attitudes towards both Persian and Mazandarani, their speech behaviour, and the consequences of the language shift process.

According to Shahidi, the language policies of the Pahlavi Dynasty as well as the Islamic Republic have promoted a loss of status of minority languages in the country. As a result of the low status of Mazandarani in sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociopsychological situations, parents in urban milieus have stopped transmitting the language to their children. The informants do not show a strong negative attitude towards their ethnic language in terms of a strong positive or negative attitude towards this language. However, negative attitudes towards Mazandarani are manifested where questions of prestige, or using Mazandarani as the medium of education are concerned. The most important factors for language choice are age, education, and locality. Shahidi shows that urban young people hardly ever speak Mazandarani, and when they do, it is limited to a few words or expressions. Less educated people use Mazandarani more than those with a university degree, and people belonging to the upper social class use more Persian and less Mazandarani than people from the lower social class. Concerning locality, rural speakers use more Mazandarani and less Persian than urban speakers, even though the language shift process in rural settings is moving rapidly forward and Persian is encroaching upon many linguistic domains.

Both Bani-Shoraka’s and Shahidi’s studies are similar to Gal’s and Del Torto’s studies in that they examine minority languages and language shift. What separates Bani-Shoraka from Shahidi, is that while the main research of the former can be placed in the third wave of sociolinguistics, the latter studies a language shift situation in accordance with the theories dominating the first wave of sociolinguistics.

Based on ethnography, the situation of young people in Tehran (Iran) and their battle over the right to identity has been studied by Khosravi (2008) in Young and Defiant in Tehran. It differs from Bani-Shoraka’s and Shahidi’s studies in that Khosravi is interested in identity questions without examining any linguistic phenomena. Whereas the former two rely heavily on interviews, Khosravi’s fieldwork is a combination of appointment anthropology and conventional participant observation, with no fixed group of young people whom the researcher joined. As Khosravi describes it, the state’s effort to create a homogeneous identity for the
young people of the country is opposed by young people. The main focus of the study is the ongoing struggle between the authorities and young people, but also how this struggle is manifested in spatial relations. Khosravi studies a group of young people in the modern, middle-class neighbourhood called *Shahrak-e Gharb*, which he describes as “a centre for production, reproduction, and spreading of Western youth culture in Iran” (Khosravi 2008: 10). The aim of his study is to investigate how gender, class, and age shape the frameworks of power along a horizontal axis (men versus women; poor versus rich; Tehranis versus non-Tehranis), as well as along a vertical axis (authorities versus youth; parents versus children). According to Khosravi these young Tehranis defy the power of the authorities and the dominant order through taking part in global youth culture, for example.

The next section concerns social identities and intersectionality, which are a crucial part of this study.

### 2.4. Social identities and intersectionality

In the third wave of sociolinguistics, social identities and social categories are relevant as there is considerable focus on how they are used in social interaction. The word identity is used to describe differences and similarities between human beings, for example in regard to appearances, the way people dress, or how they speak (Lindesmith, Strauss, and Denzin 1999: 218). Identity was defined by the social psychologist Tajfel (Tajfel 1978: 63) as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. Group membership is itself a fundamental thing, and not the nature of the group itself. The focus is the individual’s own knowledge of membership and the value attached to it, as emotional significance is an essential part of a sense of identity (Joseph 2004: 76–77).

Social identity theory was ground-breaking because of its concern with the relative hierarchisations people impose on themselves and others, and especially their division between “in-groups” and “out-groups” and their membership of these groups (Joseph 2004: 76–77). In the case of the former, individuals are categorised based on their similarities and through a social comparison process, while those who are different are labelled as the out-group. For the individual, having a specific social identity means being the member of a specific group, thus being like the other members of that group, and sharing the views and standpoints of the group (Stets and Burke 2000: 225–226).
An identity is formed through the processes of self-categorisation and categorisation of others. This means that the self is reflexive, takes itself as an object and classifies, categorises, and names itself in different ways in relation to other social categories (Stets and Burke 2000: 224). Self-categorisation theory was developed by Turner et al., who explains it in the following way:

A psychological group is defined as one that is psychologically significant for the members, to which they relate themselves subjectively for social comparison and the acquisition of norms and values (i.e. with which they compare to evaluate themselves, their abilities, performances, opinions, etc., and from which they take their rules, standards and beliefs about appropriate conduct and attitudes), that they privately accept membership in, and which influences their attitudes and behaviour. In the usual terminology, it is a (positive) reference group and not merely a membership group as defined by outsiders, i.e., it is not simply a group which one is objectively in, but one which is subjectively important in determining one’s actions (Turner et al. 1987: 1–2).

While the personal self is believed to derive from a continual awareness of who he or she is, the social self is based upon the groups to which one belongs. This implies that we all have various, cross-cutting social identities. These social identities are grounded in both clearly characterized and meaningful groups, such as psychology professors, and more abstract and vague social categories, for example fellow Europeans. What is important is that depending on which identity is most significant, different perceptions of the self will be visible (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002: 164). This view is relevant in this study as the participants speak about the different groups they belong to, and they do so through a process of self-categorisation and the categorisation of others.

Social identities are also relevant to the field of sociolinguistics, and to this thesis, since the interplay between language and identity is a common object of contemporary linguistic research. The discussion in this kind of research regards whether or not an individual’s identity should be considered as something essential and inherent or socially constructed. Conceptions of identity have been readily expressed as dichotomies, such as fixed-dynamic, unchangeable-changeable, natural-cultural, and objective-subjective (Gunnarsdotter Grönberg 2004: 12–14). The sociolinguists belonging to the third wave consider identities as dynamic. Even though they connect individual identities to social groups, they do not consider this connection to be fated and predetermined. Identities are created in situations where language is used, and they are shaped by the combined effects of the surrounding structures and the participants. Third wave researchers stress that individuals are engaged in multiple practices of identity, and that they can alternate between one identity and another (Bucholtz 1999a: 209).
In this thesis social identity and social groups are relevant when the participants speak about and categorise their own social identities as well as those of other people, and in doing so contrast themselves with others groups in the Iranian society. This also means that identity is perceived here as a phenomenon constituted by the actions and speech of the participants, and the analysis is based upon the identities and social groups the participants themselves make relevant. The participants construe their identities using social categories, and different categories become relevant depending on the context.

In order to describe how different categories influence one another, the theory of intersectionality becomes relevant. An intersectional approach considers identity as created through the overlapping of different social categories (Søndergaard 1994: 61). Intersectionality is based in postmodern feminist theory, African-American feminist theory, theories regarding ethnicity, class theory, queer theory, and post-colonial theory (Lykke 2003: 48). The interest in intersectionality emerged when gender and race-based research was criticized for not being able to clarify the perceived experiences of African-American women at some neglected points of intersection (McCall 2005: 37).

According to Crenshaw (1991: 1244–1245), intersectionality should not be considered as an over-all theory, but rather a concept to visualise how power structures are intertwined on different levels, such as the political, the representative, or the structural level. Dahl (2005: 23) states that the core of an intersectional perspective is to study how different social categories interact together, rather than examining them as separate social hierarchies (Dahl 2005: 23). The areas usually dealt with in an intersectional study are gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This is not an exhaustive list, and factors such as age, religion, nationality, and occupation can be added in order to give a more detailed and fair analysis. However, the gain in increased complexity must be weighed against a discussion that can become harder to manage (Appelros 2005: 69). One criticism of intersectionality concerns this exact matter, and claims that the concept of intersectionality opens the door to analysis of eternal sets of power symmetries: gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, occupation, religion etc. If so, the concept might seem unmanageable. The benefit of an intersectional perspective in this study is to show that according to the participants, the Rashti identity is not singular in nature. It is not only one social category which decides who the participants are, nor is only gender, age, class etc. the most important factors. Rather, different aspects are important in the construction of the participants’ identity as young Rashti women, where all of these aspects play a significant role.
The theoretical framework in Kahlin’s study (2008) is intersectionality, which she uses to investigate the interplay between the social categories of gender, ethnicity, and generation membership in the construction of identity among young people. Kahlin’s data consists of both staged and natural conversations. Staged conversations refer to conversations that would not have occurred without the impact of the researcher, such as interviews. Natural conversations, on the other hand, are conversations that are a natural part of an activity and have not been intended to contribute to a study. Kahlin uses tools deriving from CA and discursive psychology in order to analyse the identities her informants make relevant in conversation through the negotiation of social categories. The social categories are specifically used by the informants in order to constitute identities and create contrasts between the in-group and out-group. In her study, Kahlin (2008: 89 and 92) shows how categorisation is used to establish solidarity within the group by focusing on common experiences and by contrasting them with other groups. She shows not only how categories are constituted through negotiation and can be treated as both obvious and essential when establishing an identity using various discursive means, but also how category-bound labels are used to establish social categories.

Like Kahlin, Ambjörnsson (2004) uses participant observations in her study, but while Kahlin employs staged and natural conversations, Ambjörnsson only uses the latter. However, both studies take into consideration Butler’s (1990a) postmodern theory and definition of gender as something one does, rather than has. Both studies also examine how identity is constructed using social categories, and how the participants contrast themselves with others in the process of identity construction. The two studies differ in that while Kahlin is more influenced by linguistic approaches such as CA and MCA, which can be seen in the focus on discursive means, Ambjörnsson’s study lands more in the field of anthropology. Ambjörnsson analyses the construction of gender at the intersection of class, sexuality, and ethnicity as she investigates how young women relate to normality, abnormality, upbringing, and social conditions in relation to gender and femininity. Her informants consist of two groups of teenage girls with separate class backgrounds at a Swedish high-school, and the goal is to examine how they constitute feminine gender positions within the frameworks of a hetero-normative order. Ambjörnsson studies conversations, behaviours and the appearance of the teenage girls, and also how the two groups of teenage girls construct their identities by positioning themselves vis-à-vis each other and other social groups.

The concept of intersectionality has also been significant for this study to analyse how the participants express their identity as Rashtis. An intersectional approach has been used to show the overlap between the social categories made
relevant in the conversations, and has thereby enabled a deeper understanding and a broadened analysis that could otherwise have become too flat and generalized.

2.5. Conversation analysis and membership categorisation analysis

People express their identities in various ways, such as appearance, behaviour, and/or speech. Speech is used in everyday life to build and maintain relationships, as well as establish who we are to each other (Drew 2005: 74). This makes conversation an important part for the analysis of individuals’ social identity, not least because all of us engage in conversational interaction in one way or another. Goodwin and Heritage (1990: 283) describe social interaction as “the primordial means through which the business of the social world is transacted, the identities of its participants are affirmed or denied, and its cultures are transmitted, renewed, and modified.” Likewise Schegloff sees talk as “the primordial scene of social life […] through which the work of the constitutive institutions of societies gets done” (Schegloff 1996: 4).

It was in the 1960s and 1970s that CA emerged from the work of the sociologist Harvey Sacks and his co-workers Jefferson and Schegloff (Speer and Stokoe 2011: 9). The goal was to have an alternative to mainstream sociology, and observe sociology and social actions which were grounded in the “details of actual events” (Sacks 1984: 26). CA has its roots in ethnomethodology, developed by the sociologist Garfinkel (1967), who believed that the members of a society continuously engage in making sense of the world. In doing so, they display their understanding of the world and make their activities “visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes” (Garfinkel 1967: vii). CA studies the organisation of social interaction, and to do this, it is assumed that the conduct, including speech, of everyday life is supposed to make sense and have meaning. According to Heritage (1984: 1):

> The central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explanation of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible socially organised interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behaviour and understand and deal with the behavior of others.

Any analysis of social categories for CA is dependent on what the participants say and do, and not what the researcher believes is relevant for his or her theory. This means that in order to claim that a specific category is relevant, the researcher
must be able to show the link between a specific identity and specific actions (Speer and Stokoe 2011: 10).

Like CA, MCA is based on the works of Sacks, but despite a shared foundation, CA and MCA have developed in different directions. According to Sacks, the focus of MCA is to “study the methodology and relevance of member’s activities of categorising members”, in other words how people use social categories to categorise and describe other people as well as themselves (Sacks 1972a). In regard to different categories, MCA requires that they must be studied in use and all analytical claims must be grounded in demonstrating how features are actually used. The reason is that membership categorisation is a lay member’s method, managed in members’ interaction with each other and the world (Silverman 1998: 139). Sacks’s work was later developed by Jayyusi (1984), Hester and Eglin (1997), Watson (1994, 1997), Hausendorf (2000), and Leudar and Nekvapil (2000) among others (Leudar, Marsland, and Nekvapil 2004: 244).

Each and every identity can also be seen as a category from a collection of categories. For example, we see “mother”, “father” and “baby” as categories belonging to the collection “family”. Sacks called such a collection a membership categorisation device (MCD) (Sacks 1972b: 32). The categories are then associated with certain activities that the members are expected to perform, as well as attendant rights and obligations (Hester and Eglin 1997: 4). MCD explains how categories can be linked together by the members of a culture. Sacks (1972b) illustrated this with a classic example taken from his data, where a child says: “The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.” According to Sacks we hear a link between “baby” and “mommy”, and thereby the MCD “family” becomes relevant for us (Sacks LC1 1992: 238, 248–249). Categories are therefore linked to specific actions, such as “crying” and “picking up” as they are the conventional and expected behaviours of both the mommy and the baby.

As each category is linked to certain activities, it helps us to understand the actions of category members. These activities are called category-bound activities, and when we know what someone’s identity is, we can also define what kind of activities they might engage in. The other way around, when we identify the activities of a person, we can draw some conclusions about what the social identity of that person is likely to be. People’s everyday understandings are based on the assumptions that “they” do such things (Sacks 1992 LC1: 179–180). The context of an action will also help us to conclude who does what and avoid ambiguity. When we hear about a confession, we might for example wonder whether it is a Catholic or a criminal confession, but as we know that these two actions look different, the context of the story will tell us how we are supposed to see the confession (Silverman 1998: 84).
Watson extended the concept of category-bound activities claiming that not only activities, but also attributes can be associated with a category (Watson 1978: 107). As specific presumed characteristics and activities are tied to specific categories, we might be accused of being prejudiced if we bring up category-based explanations. We can thus protect ourselves against this by using a category and letting others construct the explanations. We can then deny that we intended that certain explanation to be derived, while simultaneously knowing that it was exactly the explanation others would derive (Silverman 1998: 75).

One basic difference between these two approaches is that CA explicitly focuses on phenomena such as turn design and sequence organisation, whereas MCA is more concerned with “the organisation of common-sense knowledge in terms of the categories members employ in accomplishing their activities in and through talk” (Francis and Hester 2004: 21). MCA studies the “locally used, invoked and organized membership categories” (Hester and Eglin 1997: 3). When an aspect of interaction is problematized by speakers in conversation, common-sense knowledge is visible to other participants of the conversation and thereby also to the analyst (Stokoe and Smithson 2001: 253).

When it comes to contextual and social issues, a CA approach does not regard them in the analysis of data, unless the participants themselves orient to these. A CA approach seeks to adopt an emic or participants’ perspective, and the central argument is that the researcher’s stance should be to remain objective when looking at and analysing the data. This means that no categories, assumptions and theories are to be brought in by the analyst (Seedhouse 2004: 8–9, Sacks 1984). A central feature of CA is examining the unfolding talk-in-interaction turn by turn, linked to the view that participants use the sequential development as a means of interpreting each other’s actions. CA therefore puts great emphasis on the immediate context of a turn. There is, however, a broader sense of context, as talk does not take place in a vacuum and is always situated. CA concerns itself not with theories of social structure as most sociology does, but with the special character of speech-exchange systems. Instead of seeing context as abstract social forces imposing themselves on participants, the CA analyst sees participants as knowledgeable social agents who display their orientation to the relevance of context to one another. According to Hutchby and Wooffitt, we should not ignore the fact that a wider social context of interaction can be relevant for the participants, and they argue that people intuitively know that a sense of context informs people’s actions in different social scenes. For CA analysis, this intuitive view is not enough, as it fails to explain the public means participants use when demonstrating their orientation to context and the understanding of other people’s actions (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008: 138–140).
As in CA, in MCA identity is analysed from the participants’ point of view. This means that the identities used in the analysis may only be the identities made relevant by the participants when they orient towards these identities (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998). Critique aimed at MCA has partly been because of the method’s way of focusing on the participants’ point of view. Kiesling (2000) argues that expressions such as “orient towards” and “make relevant” are used in an unspecified way, as it can be difficult to decide when this actually happens. Speakers can orient towards gender by using gender specific words such as ladies or he, without gender being made relevant to the participants. Gender can also be brought up through vocal pitch or the mentioning of activities that are associated with men or women specifically. When participants make gender relevant in this way, it can be difficult to prove it empirically in the context (Kiesling 2000: 506, Stokoe and Smithson 2001: 251).

Even though this thesis uses CA and MCA, it must be noted that the researcher’s ethnographic knowledge has made it possible to consider a broader view of context than CA permits when conducting analyses of the data. The matter is, however, not black and white and there are discussions between two different and competing stances. Some researchers speak about the participants’ use of “common-sense knowledge”, which are the facts and knowledge about our everyday world and activities that an ordinary person is expected to know. However, when researchers speak about who the participants or members are, they seldom include themselves. Stokoe and Smithson (2001: 251–252) argue that analysts should also be perceived as members, and thus include their common-sense knowledge in the analysis process. In CA common-sense knowledge is seen as ahistorical and homogenous. Others acknowledge the importance of the researcher’s common-sense knowledge in the analysis, if (s)he is also a member of the culture where the talk is produced.

MCA is used in this study in the analysis of the Rashti identity. It is, for example, applicable when the participants orient towards being Rashti in their speech, and simultaneously contrast themselves with other categories by associating those categories with different sets of attributes and activities. By speaking about and describing the attributes and activities associated with a Rashti person as well as the “other”, the participants generalise and illustrate stereotypical images. When for example all the Rashtis are described in terms of positive category-bound attributes and activities, the “others” are frequently linked to negative ones, showing Rashti people as superior and better.
2.6. Positioning and categorisation

The identity (or identities) of a person can become relevant in a conversation when the speakers take a certain position vis-à-vis themselves as well as others, or by positioning and/or categorising themselves vis-à-vis others. This enables people to find a place for themselves, either inside or outside the group, making relevant the different versions of the identity in relation to other people (McKinlay and Dunnett 1998: 34–51). The identity made relevant is dependent on contextual factors, and is constructed in cooperation with other participants in the interaction through collective negotiations and interaction (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995: 219).

Positioning can simply be described as the discursive production of selves, and is defined by Davies and Harré (1990: 43) as a concept that “helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters in contrast to the way in which the use of ‘role’ serves to highlight static, formal and ritualistic aspects”. Positioning can also be described as a way of showing distance or solidarity towards the rest of the participants in a conversation, and thus give a clue to the participants’ ways of making relevant their identity through contrast. In discourse there are a number of positions that one can identify with. These identities are, however, not fixed positions but continually open and changeable. This means that there are no fixed “genuine” positions to identify with, but rather we all have numerous different identities we can identify with or be defined as, depending on the context.

In conversation participants use the generic us and them to ally themselves with or distance themselves from others. When they wish to show they belong to a group, they do so through categorisation, and when the goal is to separate oneself from a group, participants use contrasting. Categorising oneself and others is an important part of displaying social affiliation, as well as in the development and attainment of social identity. Categorisation is always done against the context of a field, and what counts is also the relationship between the various categories that exist within the field (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 241–242). By categorising ourselves and others in terms of us and them, it makes it easier for us to understand the intentions and actions of others, but also to constitute identities and our self-image (Joseph 2004: 39). Categories are created with the help of specific linguistic means, whereby associations between categories and specific activities and attributes, so called category-bound activities and category-bound attributes, are used in the construction of identities (Kahlin 2008: 80).

Contrasting is a way for the participants to position and categorise themselves and others, and implement different strategies in their speech to emphasise the differences between different social groups. These social groups are associated
with different activities and attributes, which are cultural resources in the constitution of the participants’ identities (Kahlin 2008: 81). According to Engblom (2004: 84–146), there are two main resistance strategies. One is to nuance the image of one’s own group, meaning that one reduces the differences within the group. The other way of showing resistance is by explicitly ignoring, questioning, or denying a categorisation, or more indirectly offering another description or explanation to the situation.

The aim of this thesis is to examine and describe how the participants use and constitute identities such as Rashti, other Iranians, young women, and young men in their speech. In the following section there will be an introduction to the discursive means the participants use when positioning and categorising themselves and others in conversation.

2.7. Discursive means

In conversation people use different ways to construct, negotiate, and re-negotiate their own identities, as well as the identities of others. In order to do so, conversational participants position and categorise themselves and others, as has been discussed in the previous section. In positioning and categorising people use various discursive means, such as code-switching, active voicing, and extreme case formulations, which will be presented in this section. It must be noted that it is the participants themselves who make these discursive means relevant in conversation.

2.7.1. Direct speech and active voicing

Direct speech is used in generic parts of a conversation, where the speaker wishes to show how someone else speaks or even how someone would hypothetically speak in a specific situation. Another way of using direct speech can be when one wishes to show how members of different categories argue. Traditionally, direct speech has been considered as more or less authentic reproduced speech, but Eriksson (1997) showed that direct speech is not necessarily quoting word-for-word. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998: 225) speak of active voicing, where the goal is for the information to be perceived as a direct quote, while in reality it is less probable or even impossible that the quoted person has made that specific utterance. Like direct speech, active voicing can be detected through changes in voice quality and intonation. One can also use stylized speech, where one imitates someone else’s way of speaking, for example imitating what one perceives as snobbish upper-class speech.
As will be shown in chapters 5–7 active voicing is used by the participants in several of the examples when the participants exemplify real or hypothetical situations. The purpose of giving examples are to add strength to the participants’ own claims and statements.

2.7.2. Code-switching
Code-switching is a common phenomenon in bilingual and bidialectal speech, and can occur on any level of linguistic differentiation, such as languages, styles, dialects, and registers (Bani-Shoraka 2005: 34). Auer’s definition of code-switching is that it consists of alternating between the uses of two or more “codes” in the same conversational episode (1998:1). The items are part of the same speech act, and linked both prosodically and through semantic and syntactic relations (Romaine 1995: 121).

There are various functions of code-switching, and Andersson (1997: 150) estimates the ten most common and recurrent functions to be: to emphasize a point; because a word is not yet known in both languages; for ease and efficiency of expression; as repetition to clarify; to express group identity and status, and to gain acceptance by a group; to quote someone; to interject in a conversation; to exclude someone from an episode of a conversation; to cross social or ethnic boundaries; and finally to ease tension in a conversation.

2.7.3. Extreme case formulation
It was Pomerantz (1986: 219) who first spoke about extreme case formulations (ECFs), which she argues are used when speakers wish to make complaints, accusations, justifications, and defend themselves. According to Edwards (2000: 349) ECFs are means used by speakers to refer to an event or an object that evokes its maximal or minimal properties. ECFs consist of different grammatical categories such as extreme adjectives, quantifiers, sayings, adverbs, and the superlative forms of adjectives.

ECFs can have a maximising or minimising effect, by using words such as “everyone” and “all the time”, or “no one” and “never”, respectively. Expressions such as “every time” or “everyone” show regular, frequent, or patterned events, which then stand against events that are seen as odd, idiosyncratic, or random. The importance of describing something as regular and frequent, which stands against odd and irregular, aims to illustrate that the former should be taken into consideration while the latter ought to be disregarded (Pomerantz 1986: 223).

In order to legitimise a complaint and illustrate an event as worthy of complaint, the speaker frequently portrays the offense and suffering through ECFs.
When accusing or defending, speakers usually present their case with specific ECFs of their claims. In cases when a speaker is justifying a behaviour, (s)he will describe the circumstances of that behaviour as uncomfortable, immoral, unfair, embarrassing, undesirable, or even intolerable. This makes the activities the speaker attempts to justify necessary and required (Pomerantz 1986: 228).

2.8. Theoretical positions in this study
The core of this study concerns how the participants constitute their identities through their speech and interaction, and how they relate to the concept of Rashti, be it a dialect, a geographic area, or a notion of collective characteristics. In creating their Rashti identity the participants use different social categories such as gender and religion, and also social categories based on language and geography. In the construction of their Rashti identity, the participants show that these social categories interact and overlap, making the concept of intersectionality fundamental to this study. The analytical part of the study, which concerns the co-construction of social identities using social categories from an intersectional perspective, is situated within the third wave of the sociolinguistic field.

It should be explained that the analytical part of this study is divided into two main sections, as the participants discussed two different aspects of their Rashti/Gilaki identity in the staged conversations. The first aspect, which is examined and analysed in chapter 5 regards the participants’ use of and values towards the Gilaki language and Rashti dialect, and how Rashti and Gilaki are perceived in relation to Persian. The second aspect is highlighted in chapters 6 and 7 and concerns how geography and gender are discussed by the participants when categorising themselves and other groups in society. Geography and gender are also used when the participants contrast themselves with the rest of the country when speaking about a unique Gilaki/Rashti identity.
3. Data collection procedures and methods of analysis

3.1. Introduction
This chapter describes the data collection procedure in Rasht and the methods of fieldwork and analysis used in this study. Section 3.2. clarifies the background of the researcher, how access to the field and the participants was gained, and the challenges faced with in the data collection process. Section 3.3. presents the data and different methods used in order to obtain the data, such as staged and natural conversations, participant observation, and field notes. The following section, 3.4., regards reflexivity and the role of the researcher, while section 3.5. provides a brief presentation of the participants, their networks and the amount of data gathered from each staged conversation. A longer and more comprehensive presentation of the participants can be found in Appendix 1. Section 3.6. provides the ethical considerations that had to be acknowledged in conducting a study of this kind, and the final section, 3.7. regards how the data was dealt with and analysed.

3.2. Access to the field and the participants
Obtaining access to a field has a lot to do with how someone handles the intra- and interpersonal connections one has, since some fields are more closed and harder to penetrate for outsiders than others. As a young unmarried Iranian woman it is difficult to live alone in Iran, and people can be reluctant to let accommodation to an unmarried woman. By living with a close relative it was easier for me to conduct the study, since neighbours would know who I was and the purpose of my stay.

My Swedish background did not mean, however, that I was freer in society, in restaurants and cafés, in parks, in the car when driving around or when involved in other activities with the participants. I would be considered an Iranian woman, and as such obliged to follow the rules and laws of the Iranian society, especially those of clothing and interacting with people of the opposite sex.
Another challenge is that a researcher has to depend on possible gatekeepers\(^2\) and the willingness of people to participate. On several occasions participants rescheduled appointments or even cancelled altogether without any specific explanation. Much time was spent on waiting for participants to get in touch and decide on a time and place to meet.

Access to participants can be facilitated if there are social ties and connections, and the researcher might be able to get more information from participants who have formerly been hesitant to participate if it turns out that there are social connections other than just researcher and participants (Hoffman 1980: 46–7). Since I was born and partially raised in Iran and had travelled back several times since the year 2000, I was able to ask relatives and friends for help in order to gain access to participants. My continuous visits to Rasht have also enabled me to get in touch with people and make friends with those who are interested in the culture of the region, and they have in turn introduced me to others who try to keep the language and the culture of the region alive. That was for example how I managed to come in contact with *Khaneye Farhang*\(^3\), where I met some the participants who took part in this study.

There are also fields and settings which are much easier to access if the observer has the “correct”, “ascribed” characteristics, such as gender, age, religion, appearance, race, and/or ethnic identification. These attributes can help in approaching the field and its gatekeepers and members, and secure their trust and willingness to interact (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 73, Aspers 2010: 62). My Iranian background, as well as my age and ability to speak both the Persian language and the Rashti dialect made it easier to get in touch with people who were willing to take part in this study. Several of the participants also found it fascinating that an Iranian-Swedish researcher would come to Iran to conduct studies among young people concerning the Rashti identity.

### 3.3. Data and methods of data collection

For this study, two periods of fieldwork have been conducted in Rasht, each lasting for three months. The first trip took place from April to June 2009, and the second period of fieldwork took place from mid-January to mid-April 2011. The participants consist of young Rashti women in their teens to late twenties, and different kinds of methods were used in the data-gathering process of this thesis,

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\(^2\) Gatekeepers are people who exercise control over the researcher’s access to the field, and who have the power to introduce the researcher to the relevant participants.

\(^3\) *Khaneye farhang* can be translated “the house of culture” and is an association for people who are interested in local culture. The association organises classes, workshops, and exhibitions.
namely participant observation, field notes and audio-recorded staged and natural conversations.

The intention of the first trip, which took place from April to June 2009, was to get in touch with young women, and speak with them concerning their language values and language behaviour. For these staged conversations there were a set of topics, which can be found in Appendix 2. However, the main body of the recordings was carried out during the second period of fieldwork. For the first period of fieldwork, only recording of staged conversations was used as a means to collect data. However, due to technical problems all of the data but one conversation was lost.

The second period of fieldwork in Rasht took place from February to April 2011, and participant observation, field notes, and natural conversations were added to the methods of data collection. During the second period of fieldwork, there would often be situations where there were mixed groups of young men and women spending time together in groups. The young men were present in the natural conversations, but the main data used in the analysis of this study constitutes examples from the staged conversations where only the young women participate, with the exception of one conversation where the mother of one of the participants was present and would at times comment on the ongoing discussion.

In 3.3.1. the audio-recorded conversations are discussed, followed by a discussion regarding participant observation and field notes in 3.3.2. Even though they have not been analysed to the same extent as the staged conversations, the natural conversations, participant observation and field notes have provided the researcher with important background knowledge and an understanding of the lives of the participants and of the field.

3.3.1. Staged and natural conversations
In her study, Kahlin (2008: 43) discusses staged and natural conversations, where the former are conversations that would not have occurred without the impact of the researcher, such as interviews and different types of group discussions. Natural conversations, on the other hand, are conversations that are a natural part of an activity and which are not meant primarily to be part of a study. Kahlin emphasises that staged conversations have been criticised for being influenced by the researcher and the staged situation. It is problematic to use interviews and discussions as a reflection of reality and independent of the situation, but according to Baker (1997: 136), it is therefore of great importance that the analysis take the context and the relationship between the participants into consideration, regardless of whether the situation in question is staged and part of a study or not. In my
experience, my presence as an Iranian living in Sweden and conducting research concerning the Gilaki/Rashti identity and language influenced both the staged and the natural conversations, as well as activities and conversations that were not recorded. It was therefore important for me as a researcher to be aware of this in the analysis of the data.

Before the staged conversations, a set of topics and questions were prepared for the participants to discuss.\(^4\) Once I had got in touch with the young women who were willing to participate, we would decide on a time and place to meet. For the benefit of the quality of the conversations to be recorded, it was considered best to conduct the staged conversations in an environment that would not be too noisy or where the conversations would not be interrupted. Consequently, four of the conversations took place in a home environment, one conversation took place at the NGO where the participants were active and at a time when no one else was there. The final conversation took place at a café, which was known for being a quiet place where the clientele would mostly spend their time reading.

For each of the staged conversations, I was familiar with at least one of the participants, who was asked to bring along at least one of her friends for the discussion. However, for two of the staged conversations, there was only one participant, as the friends these young women had asked to participate decided at the last minute that they did not want to. In both cases the friend in question claimed that she did not have time to be part of the study.

All of the six staged conversations were initiated by the researcher asking the participants to introduce themselves, their age and occupation. The participants would then be asked what they like to do in their free time and usually what kind of music and movies they like, in order to make them feel at ease and get used to the conversation being recorded. The researcher would then bring up the pre-prepared topics one at a time, and depending on what the participants talked about the researcher would then ask further questions. However, sometimes the participants showed a lack of interest in a topic, in which case they were not pressured to answer, but rather they were allowed to discuss matters they preferred. Instead the researcher would try to get back to the subject later on in the interview to see if they showed any willingness to discuss it then. At other times there was simply no time to talk about all of the subjects.

In some cases the participants went astray and one topic led to another, and new topics were brought up. Sometimes a specific topic the researcher knew the participants were interested in was initiated, in order to break the ice and make the

\(^4\) These topics and questions can be seen in Appendix 2.
participants feel at ease. In other cases the participants expected to be asked ques-
tions and the researcher to lead the conversation more actively, especially if we
did not know each other very well. Consequently, exactly the same questions and
topics were not discussed by all groups.

Apart from the six recorded staged conversations there are eight other audio-
recordings, called natural conversations. The intention was to record the partici-
pants when they spent time with friends in informal settings, in order to see what
they talked about and how they talked when they were not being interviewed.

Three of the natural conversations took place when we were driving around
the city, three at different cafés, and the last two at the home of one of the partic-
ipants when we were hanging out. In cafés it was not difficult to make audio-
recordings and the recorder would simply be placed on the table. The downside
of these audio-recordings is that they were in loud and noisy environments, usu-
ally with 10–20 people partaking in the conversations, which made a transcription
of the conversations problematic, though the natural conversations and recordings
were very helpful in regard to understanding the field and getting to know the
participants. The natural conversations have also been used when it has been rel-
levant for the analysis of the staged conversations in chapters 5–7. There are two
reasons why the natural conversations have not been used to a greater extent. The
first, as mentioned above, is that the environments where the recordings took
place were often too loud and with many participants speaking, making it difficult
to make out what was said and by whom. The second reason why they are ex-
cluded is that the participants would speak about topics that would mostly concern
their own work and hobbies, for example literature or writing. Even though it was
interesting to listen to them and learn more about their lives, there was little data
in them that was relevant and could be used in this thesis.

3.3.2. Participant observation and field notes
According to Aspers (2010:30) ethnographic methods, such as participant obser-
vation and field notes, require the researcher to integrate with the people (s)he is
supposed to examine. Therefore, (s)he cannot stay completely in the role of a re-
searcher in order to succeed in her study. This interaction is also known as (par-
ticipant) observation. One description of participant observation is:

The participant observer gathers data by participating in the daily life of the
group or organization he studies. He watches the people he is studying to see
in what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters
into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and
discovers their interpretation of the events he has observed (Becker 1958: 652).
Even at times when the researcher plays no role in the participants’ production of accounts one can never be certain whether or not the researcher’s presence has influenced the participants. The goal can therefore not be to avoid bias, but rather to interpret the data in the best way possible. Combining different methods, such as participant observation and interviews, can help illuminate data gathered through each method (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 101–102). For example, it is not certain whether or not the participants would speak the Rashti dialect because they do it even without my presence, or because they did so since they were aware of the research and wished to display their knowledge of Rashti.

My participant observation consists mainly of the time I spent with the participants during my visit in 2011, as it was during this trip I became friends with the majority of the participants, and I spent most of my days with these young women and their families and friends. Apart from shedding further light on the data gathered, participant observation in combination with the natural conversations, helped me learn about and understand the lives of the participants. It also helped me to adjust better to life in Iran by dressing appropriately and using the correct vocabulary for people of my age. It was also a way to get in touch with young women willing to participate in the staged conversations, as going out with people I already knew made it possible to get in touch with other young women. My participation in the lives and activities of the participants would differ depending on which group I associated with. Some participants treated me as part of the family and invited me to their homes, where considerable time was spent with them and their families. With other participants there would be a lower degree of interaction and we would only meet occasionally and only outside their homes. I am aware that my presence might have influenced the participants, but it is important to keep in mind that all contexts are dynamic and are affected by the actors taking part.

After the first period of fieldwork I realised the necessity of taking notes about the participants I met, e.g. when and where we met, what we did and talked about, the setting etcetera, since all of this can easily be forgotten.

A study of this sort is not only about data collection and data analysis. It also requires the researcher to be aware of her own role in the field and her interaction with the participants. The following section will therefore concern reflexivity and what role the researcher has in her study.
3.4. Reflexivity and the role of the researcher

Reflexivity is a crucial part of social studies, and concerns how the researcher reflects on herself, the research process, and representation. The researcher should not only treat reflexivity as an awareness-raising activity before and during data collection. According to Finlay (2003: 108), as researchers engage with reflexivity, we are involved in the “process of continually reflecting upon our interpretations of both our experiences and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes.”

Peake and Trotz (1999: 37) argue that it is important for the researcher to consider his/her positionality as it strengthens the research:

It can strengthen our commitment to conduct good research based on building relations of mutual respect and recognition. It does, however, entail abandoning the search for objectivity in favour of critical provisional analysis based on plurality (temporally and spatially) situated voices and silences.

Reflexivity has been applied to the different stages of the research. Feminist scholars (Cotterill 1992; Edwards 1990; Finch 1984; Ribbens 1989; Song and Parker 1995) have debated how similarities and differences between the researcher and researched in regard to class, race, gender, and sexuality can influence the nature and structure of research relationships.

Having a reflexive approach also means that the position and aim of the researcher is shaped by his/her socio-historical situation, and dismisses the idea that a researcher can do his/her research disregarding the environment, isolated from both the world and the researcher’s past, since one cannot flee from the social world and simultaneously study it. On the contrary, the study will be influenced by social processes and personal characteristics. Research should be considered as an active process where observation, theoretical interpretation, asking questions and understanding the answers, taking field notes, transcribing recordings of various kinds and writing research reports all together lead to understanding the world. As the researcher will influence the people in the field, the importance is not to try to eliminate the participants’ awareness of the researcher. It is necessary to acknowledge the fact that the researcher will influence the field and make this a fundamental part of the analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 15–17).

Taking reflexivity into account, it is very clear that I am myself a part of my study, especially when the participants discuss me and my study. Also some of the activities I was engaged in, for example visiting Kuche Esfahan or the Rasht Museum, were suggested by the participants as they knew about my field of research, and believed visiting these places would be of interest to this study. In the
recordings I am mentioned in two ways. The first way is when the participants talk among themselves about me as a Swedish-Iranian researcher who has come to Rasht in order to conduct a study about the Rashti identity and the Rashti dialect. The second way is when the participants speak to me directly and discuss my research and my role as a researcher.

As an Iranian with roots in Rasht, and with relatives and friends living in the city, I was mostly considered as “one of the group”, an *insider*. However, even when I became friends with the young women and men it was at times clear that the reason for my stay in Rasht was to gather data for my research. This does not mean that friendship was faked in order to gather data, but rather that friendship came as a bonus in the process. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to believe that I was considered a complete insider, but I believe that who I am and the way I connected and communicated with people was helpful in shaping the relationships and trust that were important for the fieldwork. That I was not a complete insider became apparent at times when the participants placed me in different categories, “othered” me, brought up signs of difference between us, and acted as an “authority” by explaining things regarding Iranian culture or the Gilaki/Rashti culture and language they believed I was unaware of since I had been brought up in Sweden.

So while in some respects, the participants and I did not share the same identity in all contexts, we shared affinities in other contexts. Rather than perceiving my roles as an insider or outsider as separate from one another, I believe them to be at either end of a continuum, and my role in Rashti society and being friends with the participants a combination of both. Depending on the situation and context, one role could become more visible, while in other situations the other role would be more apparent. When there were ambivalences, tensions, or instabilities in my position, it became important to be reflexive about the contradictions of my position and in-between status. By and large, my identity as an outsider at times made participants willing to talk freely, and they welcomed me into their lives and even homes. There was also a natural acceptance of my presence, and a collective positioning of me as an acceptable outsider and researcher. My experience during my time of fieldwork showed me that identities and positions are unstable, and can change depending on the context, making the insider-outsider boundaries blurry.
3.5. The participants

In section 3.3.1. there is a presentation of the participants and the groups. An additional presentation can be found in Appendix 1. In the following section, 3.3.2., the amount of data recorded in each of the staged conversations can be found.

3.5.1. Presentation of the participants

The initial criteria for participants in this study were that they would (1) be women in their late teens to late twenties, (2) have Gilaki roots and (3) live in Rasht. There were 11 young women, plus the mother of one of the young women in the Friend Group, participating in the staged conversations.

I got in touch with the participants in different ways. One of the participants in the Friend Group, Kamand, was a young woman I got to know briefly during my visit in 2009, and who became a close friend during my visit in 2011. For the staged conversations she invited one of her friends, Samira, to participate.

The Café Girl, Roya and I were introduced to each other through the daughter of one of my mother’s friends. I met the Café Girl on several occasions when I was out with our mutual acquaintance, and when asked if she would be willing to participate in a staged conversation she accepted. Even though Roya and I did not meet alone besides during the staged conversation, we met on several occasions at cafés and restaurants when I accompanied our mutual friend.

The two participants in the NGO Group were introduced to me through a young woman who had participated in an interview during my visit in 2009. As she was too busy to participate once more, she told me about an NGO she was active in and invited me to one of their meetings. I was then introduced as a researcher living in Sweden visiting Iran in order to speak to young Rashti women. At the meeting I started talking to Shahnaz, who became interested in my work and in participating in a staged conversation. Shahnaz, in turn, introduced me to Nasim who was also an active member of the NGO and who was willing to be part of the study. I became close friends with these participants as well, and Shahnaz and I spent some time together outside the NGO. I also helped the organisation when they arranged a flea market for the benefit of an orphanage they help to support.

I was introduced to the Theatre Girl, Lida, during a picnic I was invited to by some of the members of the Khaneye Farhang. We started talking about my research as she expressed interest in folklore culture and theatre. She was then asked if she would be willing to take part in the study in a staged conversation. Lida and I also spent some time together visiting cafés, going to the movies and the Rasht Museum, as she thought that it could be of interest to me and my research.
The three young women in the Writing Group, Azar, Taban, and Fariba and I became acquainted during my first visit to the Khaneye Farhang. Before going to Iran in 2011, I visited a Facebook group with members from Gilan. I told the members about my study and asked if anyone could introduce me to young Rashti women who would be willing to participate. One of the members introduced me to a shopkeeper in the Rasht bazar whom she said was interested in Gilaki culture. Once I was in Iran, I visited him and was told that there was a writing class at Khaneye Farhang that very evening. He was kind enough to call the association and tell them I would visit them, and asked them to help me. I visited the writing class, introduced myself and my research and asked the participants of the writing class if they would consider partaking. Apart from spending time with the participants at the weekly writing classes, we spent time together outside class visiting restaurants and driving around the city.

The teenage girls in the School-Girl Group are the only participants who also took part in a staged conversation during my visit in 2009. I was introduced to them through a young woman living in the same building as me in Rasht, and who was a classmate of the two girls’. During my visit in 2011, I asked my neighbour to ask the two girls if they were willing to meet with me once more and participate in a staged conversation. These two participants were the only ones I met only during the staged conversation, and whom I have not been in contact with afterwards.

The reason why there was only one participant when I conducted staged conversations with the Café Girl and the Theatre Girl, is that the friends these two young women were supposed to bring with them to the staged conversations decided at the last minute that they were not interested in partaking. It was then too late to find someone else and the conversations were conducted with only one participant.

Some of the participants were complete strangers to the participants in other settings, while others already knew each other. The Theatre Girl, for example, turned out to be an active member of both the NGO Group and the Khaneye Farhang, where I got acquainted with the participants in the Writing Group. Furthermore, the Café Girl is acquainted with one of the participants in the School-Girl Group as they both attended the same high-school the year before these recordings.
3.5.2. The amount of data from the staged conversations
The amount of data recorded differs for each of the staged conversations. Below is a table of the amount of data in each audio-recording. The recordings were made between February and April of 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Staged conversations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friend Group</strong></td>
<td>6th April 1h 4 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3 participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Café Girl</strong></td>
<td>8th March 42 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 participant)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NGO Group</strong></td>
<td>7th March 1h 10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2 participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Theatre Girl</strong></td>
<td>21st February 1h 3 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 participant)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing Group</strong></td>
<td>28th February 1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3 participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School-Girl Group</strong></td>
<td>12th February 1h 12 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2 participants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6. Ethical considerations
The field of research ethics concerns the relationship between research and ethics, ethical demands on the researcher, and ethical demands on the direction and implementation of the research. According to Hermerén et al. (2011: 40) there are some general principles regulating good research ethics. An important part of research ethics concerns the obligations of the researcher towards the participants before, during and after the study has taken place. Hermerén et al. (2011) discuss participant observation, and stress that the ideal is for the participants to be informed about their participation in the study, and normally there is also a need for written consent. Guidelines for video recordings are also discussed, of which some can also be implemented when it comes to the case of audio recordings. These guidelines that are also relevant for audio recordings, and include informing participants about the recordings taking place, whether the recordings are to be copied or used for purposes other than the study, and for the participants to be able
to listen to the recordings if they wish. The participants should also be anonymous, and informed about how, where, and for how long the recordings will be stored.

All of the participants were told that their opinions and discussions would be part of a thesis, but that they would be anonymous. They were also informed that the data gathered through recordings would be used solely for scientific purposes. All of the participants partaking in the audio-recorded conversations were informed beforehand that they would be recorded, giving them a chance to decline their participation. During the staged conversations with the School-Girl Group, there were three participants present, but only two chose to be part of the conversation and answer the questions.

In all but one of the staged conversations, the participants were in their twenties and no consent was therefore requested from their parents. In one of the groups, two teenage girls, aged 17 years old, took part in the staged conversations, in which case they were asked beforehand to inform their parents about the study they were going to participate in and get permission. I talked to the parents, and was told that their daughters had informed them about my study, and that none of the parents had any objections against their children’s participation in the study.

The identity of the participants as well as all the data gathered have been handled with utmost care and confidentiality. Participants in the different groups have not been told about the identity of participants from other groups or what the participants in the different groups have discussed. There were times when I spent time with some participants, and we met participants from other groups, but they already knew each other. In those cases the participants themselves would talk about the study and be amused about the fact that they were all part of it. The names of all the participants have been changed, as well as the names of the cafés and restaurants visited.

In a country where minority cultures and languages have very low priority, and are even a source of political tension in some regions, such as Khuzistan, Azerbaijan, Balochistan, and Kurdistan, conducting research in the field of minority languages requires certain caution and consideration. This made audio recordings a better option in the data gathering procedure than video recordings.

As a researcher I felt responsible for myself, the relatives I lived with, the participants and their families, but also for the research outcome, which were all overlapping in my fieldwork experience. Over time, when I became closer to some of the participants it became obvious that I had to draw the line between my roles as a friend and a researcher. On occasions the young women would discuss matters regarding their love or sex lives, which I have not included in the study. What they said could have been of great value to the research, but it would also have
been a breach of confidence and would have crossed the boundaries of their personal lives. Since I was considered as their friend they would be very open about giving details even when they were aware that the recorder was on.

3.7. The analysis of the data

Once I returned to Sweden in April 2011, it was time to listen through the recordings and start thinking how they should be processed. I started to transcribe them in order to get an overview of their contents. A transcription key can be found on pages 8–9. It soon became clear that the natural conversations would not be transcribed and used in the study, as has been explained in section 3.3.1. As this study has been written in English, the transcripts also needed to be translated into English.

Once the recordings had been transcribed and translated, it was time to read through them in order to see what social categories the participants made relevant in their talk. It was soon clear that the participants brought up social categories when they spoke about the languages and varieties used in Rasht and Gilan, and when they discussed the Rashtis and Gilaks in contrast with people living in other parts of the country. I then read through the staged conversation in order to see what parts could be used as examples for the different chapters. When the examples for each specific chapter were chosen, I needed to look through them in order to detect key words and key themes, which could enable me to choose sub-themes. The process of choosing the topic for each of the analysis chapters, examples that would fit in the different chapters, and sub-themes was ongoing and overlapping, and needed to be revised and re-edited over and over again, in order to make sure that all of these matched. At times, it would turn out that some examples or sub-themes were not suitable for a specific chapter or for the study at all. What had seemed quite fruitful at first, would turn out to be useless for an analysis. At other times, the examples needed to be shortened or divided into several parts.

Once examples had been selected to illustrate the key themes and sub-themes, the detailed analysis of each example could take place. For this purpose MCA has been used to identify when the participants orient towards being Rashti in their speech, and simultaneously contrast themselves with other groups in society by associating those themselves and others with different sets of category-bound attributes and activities. CA has been useful as it has provided an overall approach to the conversations and how they should be dealt with and analysed. The emic perspective and the discursive means are for example, both part of CA.
What was more difficult was to see what social categories were of relevance to the participants, and whether they could comprise chapters of their own. At first it seemed that certain categories were important as they were subjects that the participants discussed frequently. But reading through the transcriptions and translations more times, it became clear that even though such a category was made relevant by the participants, nothing was said in the conversations about it that made it specific for the people of Rasht or Gilan. On the other hand, there were social categories that emerged as very important right from the beginning, such as gender. The social category of gender is discussed in chapter 5 in relation to the participants’ views regarding speaking Gilaki and Rashti as well as Persian with an accent. But gender was also discussed by the participants in regard to how they view Rashti men and women in contrast to men and women living in other parts of Iran. Therefore the social category of gender needed a whole chapter of its own, and consists now chapter 7 of this study.

When the examples for each theme had been chosen, I had to fine-tune the translations once more, in order to make sure the Persian transcripts matched the English translations. I also had to scrutinise the examples in order to see what discursive means the participants used when they discussed their Rashti/Gilaki identities, and how they categorised themselves and others.
4. Sociolinguistic background

4.1. Introduction

In order to familiarize the reader with the province of Gilan and the city of Rasht, this chapter is meant to partly function as a presentation of the region, but also an introduction to the country of Iran as a whole. Much of this chapter is based on the literature of others, but it has also been inspired by the researcher’s first hand experiences, fieldwork, and field notes.

As this study concerns language values and the participants identifying themselves by invoking geographical and gender norms, this chapter will focus on these aspects of Iran and Gilan. Since the Rashti identity is bound to a specific geographic area, it is necessary to give an introduction to the history of the region, as well as its contacts with foreigners, such as Arabs, Russians, and Europeans. The reason these three groups are in focus is because they are brought up by the participants when they speak about the possible foreign impact on Gilan, Rasht, and the Rashti identity (see chapter 6).

Section 4.2. works as an introduction to the history of the Gilan Province and the city of Rasht, as well as to the economic situation of the province. Since the Rashti dialect as part of the Rashti identity is the focal point of chapter 5, the following section, 4.3., deals with the sociolinguistic background of the province of Gilan, focusing on its relation to the country as a whole. In order for the reader to gain an understanding of the ambiguity between language and dialect in general, section 4.3.1. attempts to clarify this relationship. Section 4.3.2. functions as a short introduction to the Iranian languages in general and the Gilaki language in particular, and continues by discussing the influence of the Persian language on the Gilaki language due to the urbanisation process and how the media and education have influenced what has occurred during the last century. As the Rashti identity is central to this study, it is necessary to clarify the different meanings of the word, namely the three brought up by the participants (see section 4.3.3.).

As the relationship between Persian and Gilaki, as well as Persian and other minority languages in Iran, has been influenced by language policies during the twentieth century, section 4.4. discusses the government policies of the Pahlavi era as well as those of the Islamic Republic. The aim is to give the reader a sense
of a continuum since the early twentieth century regarding how the central governments have approached the question of minority groups and minority languages in Iran. In Iran the role of the state regarding language policy and language planning is important, due to the state language ideology. Therefore there will also be a part illuminating the link between power, language, and state language ideology during the 20th century with its strong links to nationalism. There will also be an account of the standpoint of the Iranian government regarding Persian as the official language of the country, and the languages of the ethnic and religious minorities existing within the border of Iran.

As chapter 7 (and in part chapter 6) concerns gender, it is important for the reader to be familiar with the prevailing Iranian gender norms. Therefore section 4.5.1. concerns the development of gender norms beginning in early 20th, and how they have affected and influenced the situation of women specifically. The following section, 4.5.2.–4.5.3., function as an introduction to contemporary Iran. These two sections introduce the general norms of the country and how Iranians in general relate to the public and private spheres in regard to clothing, appearance, behaviour and religious piety, as there is a complete separation between these two spheres in Iran.

4.2. The Gilan Province

The province of Gilan is situated in north-western Iran, including the north-western end of the Alborz Mountain Range, as well as the western part of the Caspian Lowlands. In the north-western part of the province, the Talesh Highlands can be found stretching and separating Gilan from Azerbaijan (Bazin 2001: 618). The Gilaks live in the central plain, the eastern coastal fringe, and the south-western highlands of the province. The Gilaks can be divided into three sub-groups based on dialect and socio-cultural differences. The Rashti people live in the western part of the plain, and the Lahijani in the eastern part (Bazin 2001: 622). The Rashti and Lahijani are divided based on their dialect types. The river of Safidrud is the general border of these two dialects, with Rashti living on the western side, and the Lahijani on the eastern (Stilo 2001). The third group, the Galeshi or Deylami, live in the south-western mountain area and, according to Bazin, differ both in language and lifestyle. While the first two groups have long led a paddy-growing lifestyle in the plains, the Galeshi have led an agro-pastoral lifestyle in the mountain regions (Bazin 2001: 622).
Iran has suffered various invasions, one of the most influential ones being the Arab invasion in the 7th century. According to Shahidi (2008: 22) the situation in the Caspian provinces was different from the rest of the country, and the Alborz Mountain Range functioned as a barrier against invasion and integration into the Caliphate. Mass conversion in the region did not take place until the late 9th and early 10th century. Even after the conversion to Islam, the province of Gilan maintained semi-independence, and was ruled by clans of petty nobility located in the central region of Gilan around Lahijan and Rasht (Medelung 2001: 634–635). The belief in the ability of their ancestors to stand up to the Arabs has made the Gilaks of today see themselves as dissidents and revolutionaries. This perception has been consolidated by revolutionary movements in the early 20th century, such as their involvement in the Constitutional Revolution and the Jangali Movement led by Mirza Kuchek Khan (Bromberger 2011a).

Besides the Arab invasion there have been other invaders and conquerors. In the 13th century A.D. the Mongols invaded Iran, but Gilan remained independent during the first Mongol Ilkhan. Even after the incorporation of Gilan into the empire, the province remained under the rule of local dynasties. It was not until 1592 that the central government of Iran appointed governors to rule the province (Kasheff 2001: 635, 641). In the 14th century, the centre of Gilan Province was moved from the mountains to the plains, and the city of Rasht began to develop. It was,
however, not until the 17th century and the incorporation of Gilan into the Persian Safavid kingdom, that Rasht became the provincial capital of Gilan. Several factors have played a role in the growth of Rasht from a village to a city. The reasons have been its location in the heart of Gilan as well as the road from Bandar Anzali to Tehran, Rasht’s proximity to the Caspian Sea, and the development of trade with the West at the beginning of the 17th century (Bromberger 2011b).

In 1722 the Russians invaded northern Iran and in September 1723 Gilan, Mazandaran, and Astarabad (today known as Golestan) were added to Russia and remained under Russian control until 1734, when they were taken back by Iran (Rezazadeh Langaroudi 2001a: 643). Revolts and insubordination have continued into modern history. In 1804 the Russians tried to land in Anzali harbour but met resistance from the locals and were forced to withdraw (Bromberger 2011a). Yet all contact with foreigners has not been negative. Due to contacts with Russia, major developments took place in the 19th–20th centuries that led to an expansion in foreign trade and a rise in maritime transportation. This also led to the development of the Tehran–Anzali transit route through Qazvin and Rasht (Rezazadeh Langaroudi 2001b: 645).

In 1925 Reza Khan became the Shah of Iran, replacing the Qajar Dynasty and establishing the Pahlavi Dynasty. The focus during the reign of Reza Shah was on Persian history, and different ethnic minorities were pressured to assimilate into what Reza Shah saw as the “superior” Persian ethnicity and culture. Those who resisted faced violence, humiliation, and alienation. The policy of the Pahlavi Dynasty was one nation, one language, one culture, using the educational system through which the Persian ethnicity and language were described as superior, pure, and sacred. Soon Reza Shah began the centralisation of power to the capital, partly by bringing an end to the semi-independent status of provinces like Azerbaijan, Khuzistan (Arabistan), Luristan, and Kurdistan (Asgharzadeh 2007: 86–106).

By 1906, about forty representatives of foreign companies were present in Rasht, trading in silk, processing cocoons, and supplying seeds to the farmers (Lafont and Rabino 1910: 143-44). Besides the European trading houses, Russia and Turkey had consular services in Rasht, and France and Britain had vice-consuls. The presence of international diplomacy and trade enabled the development of “European style” cultural activities before they were established in other Iranian towns and provinces. In the early 20th century a theatre was founded, a library opened, and some fifty magazines and newspapers were printed in Rasht (Nowzad 2000: 15–94).

Being open to new ideas from Europe, Russia and the Caucasus, and the creation of new associations can be seen as reasons for the involvement of the Rashti
people in the Constitutional Revolution. In 1911 the Russians, who supported the Shah, answered by occupying northern Iran and Rasht (Bromberger 2011b). During the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11 many societies (anjoman) were established and workers united to go on strike. There were also many protest and rebellions against the central government (Afary 1989: 69, Afary 1991: 137, 147–146).

In the early 20th century the Jangali Movement played a significant role in Rasht. The Jangali Movement took shape in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, in response to the political turmoil following World War I and the occupation of Iran by Ottoman and British and Russian troops. The Jangali Movement was led by Mirza Kuchek Khan, opposing the Tehran government, which the members of the Movement believed had lost its independence and fallen under the influence of the British and Russians. The Jangali Movement formally disavowed the central government and proclaimed their intention to free Iran from both foreign influences and the domination of landed elites and tribal rulers. The rebellion against the government continued into the Pahlavi era, and the Jangali Movement occupied Rasht and established a town hall and a courthouse, appointed a local governor, and controlled the police, and other important authorities (Bromberger 2011b, Dailami 2008).
In 1918, the city of Rasht was taken by the British, and the following year by Reza Shah and his troops. In 1920, the Bolsheviks landed in the province and the Socialist Republic of Persia was founded, with Rasht as the capital and Mirza Kuchek Khan, the leader of the Jangali Movement, as president. The Socialist Republic of Persia, however, came to an abrupt end as a result of the Russo-Persian Treaty of 1921. In the same year, Reza Shah occupied Rasht, and Mirza Kuchek Khan froze to death in the Talesh Mountains trying to escape the Shah’s troops. With the leader of the movement dead, the Jangali Movement came to an end as well (Bromberger 2011b). During the reign of the Islamic Republic, Mirza Kuchek Khan has been celebrated as a hero protesting the cruelties of the Pahlavi Dynasty (Bromberger 2011a).

Since the time of Mohammad Reza Shah there has been considerable urbanisation and an increase in population throughout the country. In Rasht, this has led to new neighbourhoods and a different social geography. The wealthy tend to live in the fashionable areas of Golsar in the northern part of Rasht, Motahari in the centre, and Manzarieh in the south. The middle-class generally live in Bisetun, Sabze Meydan and Sa’di, while the eastern, southern, and western outskirts are mainly home to poor migrants from the countryside (Bromberger 2011b).

The ratio of urbanisation in Gilan was 46.8% in 1996, and is lower than the rest of the country (Zanjani 2001 [2012]). Only 8% of those living in urban areas work in agriculture, and the neo-urbanized population preserve close bonds with their native area (Bromberger 2012). Urbanisation is characterised by villagers leaving first for the nearby town, and later for Rasht, in order to finally move to the capital Tehran. This urbanisation pattern also has consequences for the employment sector, since by leaving the villages the migrating people go from agriculture to trade or the service sector. In rural areas, the mountain people who mainly make a living from cattle-raising are replacing the former farmers of the plain, by moving into the villages. Social distinctions have also undergone change. Alongside the *bazaris*, new classes such as entrepreneurs, doctors, tradesmen, and executives are moving into the upmarket areas of Rasht and they lead a Western consumption lifestyle. According to statistics from the year 2006, 54% of the population of Gilan lived in urban areas, while 46% lived in rural areas (Bromberger 2012).

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[5] The *bazaris* refer to the merchants, traders and artisans of the bazar, a “class” that is believed to have maintained a simple lifestyle, and to have had strong ties to the ulama, the clergy. Ulama and bazaris usually belonged to the same families, and the main income of the clergy came from the bazar and its merchants and artisans (Keddie 2006: 30).
4.3. The sociolinguistic background of Gilan

Before giving an account of how the participants in this study define Persian, Gilaki, Rashti and their mutual relationship, it is necessary to explain the terminology used in this chapter. This section starts by defining the terms language, dialect, and variety, how the sociolinguistic literature regards them and how they are linked together. This part also concerns the academic definitions of Persian and Gilaki, as well as the impact Persian has had on Gilaki due to state policies, the educational system, and the influence of the media.

4.3.1. Language and dialect – a description

With the rise of the nation, state national languages became necessary and constituted one way for citizens to identify with the state. Languages and nations are linked together because they both have stories and inspire loyalty (Daymond 2010: 38). Modern nations are generally not ethnically and linguistically homogenous, even though some people might think that it should be this way (Mooney and Soden 2011: 116).

One aspect of a language is relative size, in that a language is larger than a dialect, meaning that a variety called a language generally consists of more than one dialect. A language can either refer to a single linguistic norm, or to a group of related norms. A language is always superordinate, while a dialect is a subordinate term, for example “X is a dialect of language Y”, or “Language Y has the dialects X and Z”, whereas one would never hear “Y is a language of dialect X” (Hudson 1980: 31–32, Haugen 1966: 930–933).

There is also the matter of prestige; a language is generally more prestigious than a dialect. Whether a linguistic variety is seen as a language or a dialect often depends on how much prestige is associated with it (Hudson 1980: 31). The role of a standard language in relation to regional or social dialects depends on the speech community. In the most usual standard-dialect relationship, the standard variety is similar to the variety of a specific regional or social group, for example Tehran Persian. In these cases the standard variety is used in everyday conversation by the members of the group, and as a superposed variety (Ferguson and Huebner 1996: 35).

A standard language is the result of planned intervention by society called standardisation (Hudson 1980: 32). Language standardisation is a process where one variety of a language becomes generally accepted throughout the speech community as the “best” form of the language, and is then graded above regional and social dialects (Ferguson and Huebner 1996: 43).
In order for a variety to be considered a standard language it must have passed through a process. It starts with selection, meaning that a certain variety must have been chosen, intentionally or unintentionally, as the one to develop into the standard language. According to Hudson (1980: 32–33), the selection procedure is usually a political decision. In the second part of the process, dictionaries and grammar books are written by an agency or academy in order for everyone to agree upon what is correct. There must also be an elaboration of function, where the variety spreads to new domains, for example to the bureaucracy, the courts, the education system, as well as science and various forms of literature. The process is completed with the acceptance of the variety by the population. It will then function as a unifying force for the state and its independence and separate it from other states. This final part usually demands endorsement by politicians and social groups with high prestige.

There are difficulties involved in separating language from dialect. It can for example be difficult to define what a language and what a dialect is. Secondly, the term language can be interpreted in different ways. Some see it as a group of mutually understandable dialects which do not necessarily appear in written form, while others see a language as a standard form of speech and/or writing that has been taken up by the speakers of several dialects. This standard form will then also have some official significance in the context of nationality and state (Dalby 2003: 26–27).

Dialects function to signal both the local and the social identity of their speakers (Coulmas 2005: 19). A language is apprehended as being composed of a collection of dialects, each dialect defining the regional background of its speaker(s) (Coulmas 2005: 21). The term dialect can be used to speak about a local variety of a language as well as different forms of informal, rural, or lower-class speech, and dialects are often considered as standing outside the language and excluded from polite society (Wardhaugh 1987: 25).

A standard language is linked to urban centres and political power, and with modernisation comes the spread of innovations influencing the economy, society, and culture. Dialects, on the other hand, are regarded as out-of-mode habits that have not caught up with a modern lifestyle, and speakers of rural dialects can be stigmatized when moving into the cities. Despite the stigmatisation of dialects, they do not cease to exist (Coulmas 2005: 29–30).

4.3.2. The mutual relationship between Persian and Gilaki
The Iranian languages belong to the western group of the Indo-Iranian family, which in turn represents a major eastern branch of the Indo-European languages
Today Iranian languages are spoken all the way from Central Turkey, Syria, and Iraq in the west to Pakistan and the western parts of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China in the east. In the north, Iranian languages are spoken in central Caucasus and Tajikistan in Central Asia, while in the south they are bounded by the Persian Gulf (Windfuhr 2009: 5).

The Gilaki language has been classified by Stilo as belonging to the North-western branch of Iranian languages, and as a member of the Caspian subgroup. Apart from Persian, five Iranian languages are spoken in Gilan, namely Gilaki, Rudbari, Taleshi, Tati and Kurdish. The non-Iranian languages used in the province are Azari Turkish and Romany (of Indic origin) (Stilo 2001). The Caspian languages, of which Gilaki is one, include lexical items as well as grammatical features witnessing of quite early influence from Persian. Since the mid-20th century Gilaki has undergone massive and irreversible influence from Persian due to the economic significance of the Caspian Sea and Gilan’s closeness to Tehran. The changes include a heavy incorporation of vocabulary, syntactic interference, vowel pronunciation changes, and morpheme borrowings (Stilo 2001).

Gilaki is separated into two branches, and it is assumed that the line between these two branches is the river Safidrud. There are various sub-dialects of Gilaki, and the more east one advances the more it blends into Mazandarani. The transition between Gilaki and Mazandarani take place in the intermediate dialects in the area between Tonekabon and Kalardasht. The most obvious area where eastern and western Gilaki differs is the verbal system (Stilo 2001).

The Rashti dialect is a variety of the Gilaki language, spoken in the city of Rasht. Since the 1950s and 1960s rapid urbanisation has taken place in Gilan, and more and more people have moved from the countryside to the cities of the province. The urbanisation process has resulted in a higher level of education as well as easier access to the media, both of which are in Persian. This language contact situation has of course affected the Gilaki variety spoken in the city of Rasht, Rashti, which is heavily influenced by Persian. During the past decades the linguistic pattern of Gilaki has even moved towards a greater presence and use of Persian. A major Persification of different Gilaki varieties can also be found in most parts of Gilan Province. This can in part be explained by what Grenoble and Whaley (1998: 52–53) present in regard to language and economic forces. According to them, economy is a strong force influencing the future of an endangered language. Economic factors pressure assimilation to the economically dominant culture, and economic advancement force people to surrender their minority

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6 According to Windfuhr, the Caspian dialects consist of Galeshi, Gilaki, Mazandarani, and Gorgani (Windfuhr 2009: 14)
language in favour of a majority language. Economy also affects the availability of education and media. Education and media depend on textbooks, reference, and teachers, all of which cost money. Television, movies, video and media also cost money, and therefore producers to mass-produce in fewer languages. Media which is dedicated to the majority language will then act negatively towards any minority languages.

4.4. Iranian language policies during the 20th century

Throughout history, the language of the dominant group in a society has represented the culture, language, and history of the entire society. An effective way of achieving this goal has been through discrediting and ridiculing language. In this way the language and culture of the dominant group is displayed as superior, modern, and advanced, while the minority language and culture is represented as inferior, undeveloped, and reactionary (Asgharzadeh 2007: 129). Since there is an interconnection between culture and language, the dominating group can control a society’s history, culture, and means of self-definition by controlling the language of the dominated group, as Wa Thiong’o (1986: 15–16) puts it:

Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. […] The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized. […] Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings.

4.4.1. The impact of the Pahlavi Dynasty

Persian has been the dominant language of Iranian lands for over a thousand years. From the tenth century until the mid-nineteenth century Persian was a language of literature, culture and the lingua franca of West, South and Central Asia (Windfuhr and Perry 2009: 416). It is today the official language of Iran, thus dominating the educational system, the bureaucracy, the legal system, the mass media, and so on. Apart from Persian there are various other languages spoken in Iran by different minorities, such as different Turkic languages, Kurdish, Lori, Armenian, Balochi, and Gilaki. As the national language of Iran, Persian has had a heavy and durable influence over the past centuries on the other languages spoken in the
country. Against this trend stand some of the minorities, such as the Kurdish, the Balochi, and the Turkmen who exercise power through their linguistic, economic, social, and cultural affairs (Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 234, Emmerick 2014).

In the history of Iran, there were no attempts made to suppress and annihilate the various cultures, languages, or ethnic groups, prior to the Pahlavi Dynasty. Up until 1925 almost all ruling dynasties were of non-Persian ethnic and linguistic origin. Despite this, no attempts were made to establish their own languages as the official language of the country, and difference and diversity were accepted as part of Iran’s identity. This is also reflected in the name widely used during the Qajar period; The Protected Countries of Iran (Mamāleke mahrusehye Irān). Not until the Pahlavi Dynasty did the policy of “one nation, one language, one country” become the official position of the ruling elite. It was at this point that the overall Persification process began (Asgharzadeh 2007: 122).

In 1925 Reza Khan replaced the Qajar Dynasty and established the Pahlavi Dynasty in its place. Soon, Reza Shah began the centralisation of power to the capital, partly by bringing an end to the semi-independent status of provinces like Azerbaijan, Khuzistan (Arabistan), Luristan, Balochistan, and Kurdistan. In the attempt to establish a centralised country, Persian became the only legitimate language of the country and gained the status of national language. Languages such as Kurdish or Lori were considered dialects of Persian, and non-Indo-European languages such as Arabic and Turkish were marked as alien languages (Asgharzadeh 2007: 87, Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 231–232).

Furthermore, all the people of Iran were to be seen as having common Aryan ancestry; the official (Persian) history of the country replaced the history of the various ethnic minorities, and obtained a glorified position. The focus on the sanctity of Persian history implied that the history of other ethnic groups was nothing to be proud of and had no significant meaning for the history of the country as a whole. Instead, the different ethnic minorities were forced to be assimilated into the superior Aryan/Persian ethnicity and culture; if they refused they would face marginalisation, humiliation, and alienation. In order to achieve the image of ethnic and linguistic unity and purity, acts of linguicide and deculturation were practised in the country (Asgharzadeh 2007: 87–88, Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 232). The notion that the history, culture, language, ethnicity, and nationality of one group is superior to other groups in that same country gives the latter groups the sense that their history and culture has had no meaning in the building of the society and country they live in. Instead they should be grateful to the dominating group for allowing them to co-exist in the country, regardless of the fact that they have lived in the country for centuries (Asgharzadeh 2007: 120–121).
In efforts to promote the policy of “one nation, one language, one culture” Reza Shah and later on his son and successor Mohammad Reza Shah, also used the educational system, through which the idea of the Persian ethnicity and tongue as the superior, pure, and sacred race and language was advocated. The modern centralised system built by Reza Shah enforced Persian supremacy. The educational system was also used to convince non-Persian students of the inferiority of their ethnicity, culture, and language, and to assimilate those of non-Persian origin into Persian mainstream culture. This resulted in a lack of self-esteem, self-reliance, and self-worth among non-Persian groups, and a sense of dominance among Persians (Asgharzadeh 2007: 122, 141–142, Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 231).

4.4.2. The language policies of the Islamic Republic

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979 ethnic and linguistic discrimination continued, with gender-based and religion-based discrimination being added. The entire education system was reorganized, and all professors, lecturers, and teachers who were considered non-devout Muslims were dismissed based on the argument that devotion to Islam is of greater significance than professionalism. Simultaneously, the university curriculum, school policies, and textbooks were rewritten in order to correspond to Islamic criteria and history (Asgharzadeh 2007: 141–142, Paidar 1995: 314, Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 246–247, Keddie 2006: 332).

The Islamic government continued in the paths of the Pahlavi government’s policies towards the country’s minorities. The 1979 Constitution, which was adopted by a referendum on October 24, 1979, replaced the Constitution of 1906. In the Constitution of 1906 the various minorities are altogether ignored. In the Constitution of 1979, one can read about minorities and their rights in articles 15 and 19. Article 19 concerns the rights of the various ethnic groups of the country.

Whatever the ethnic group or tribe to whom they belong, all people of Iran enjoy equal rights, and factors such as colour, race, and language do not bestow any privileges (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1980: 36).

What is stated about the language policy of the Iranian government can be read in Article 15:

The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts as well as textbooks must be in this language and script. The use of regional and national (qaumi) languages in the press and mass media, however, as well as teaching in schools the literatures written in them, is permitted in addition to Persian (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1980: 34).
Compared to the Constitution of 1906, the articles in the post-revolutionary constitution recognize the existence of a multicultural, multilingual, and multi-ethnic Iran. This acknowledgement, however, mainly exists on paper. However, permission has been given to publish some newspapers and magazines in other languages, and there are radio and TV broadcasts in minority languages as well (Asgharzadeh 2007: 108, Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 243–244, Keddie 2006: 312–315, 332, Price 2005: 281–282).

It also says in Article 15 that Persian has been selected as the only official language of Iran, even though there are other languages in the country with millions of speakers (Asgharzadeh 2007: 109, Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 244). After the Islamic Revolution, not much has changed, and in accordance with the policy of the Pahlavi Dynasty, Persian remains the national language of all Iranians. In addition to Persian, Arabic has gained more and more importance and even non-Muslims have been encouraged to learn and speak it (Asgharzadeh 2007: 109, Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 243). The promotion of Arabic has taken resources that could have been allocated to minority languages such as Kurdish, Balochi, and Azeri among others.

The Islamic Republic, like the Pahlavi Dynasty, has maintained the notion that Persian equals Iranian. There is, for example, no mention of any specific languages, nationalities, or ethnic groups in the constitution apart from the Persian language and ethnicity. The only reference to any major group and nationality is “the Iranians” (Asgharzadeh 2007: 114, Mojab and Hassanpour 1996: 243). By not mentioning any other specific groups, one can avoid giving any specific group(s) an exceptional position, and thus disable that group from gaining any power.

As I have experienced during my visits in Iran, the state controlled television and radio broadcasts are predominantly in the Persian language, with only limited space and time allocated to programs in minority languages. Regarding the mass media, in Gilan there is the Bārān channel, which broadcasts shows and news in Gilaki in the evenings, but the TV shows broadcast are comedies and concern life in the villages, and they usually describe the villagers, who speak the Gilaki language, as stupid and very simple people. At the end of the day, the view given of the villagers and people who speak the Gilaki language is negative and condescending. The Iranian community in general is Persian dominated, and there are historical factors as to why the Persian language and culture has gained this position, despite the fact that there are several other languages spoken by millions of people in Iran.
4.5. The development of gender norms in 20th century Iran

At the beginning of the twentieth century, three overlapping gender and modernity policies arose in elite urban circles. A new nationalist policy during the Reza Shah era promoted modernity in regard to health, industrialisation, and education, with the aim of creating loyal citizens supporting the Shah. This resulted in greater authority for women in the home, even though there was no wish to radically change the gender and sexual norms of the time in regard to family or personal law. The social democrats who supported the above policies, and in addition wanted social reforms and civil liberties for the urban and rural poor, also wanted gender norms to change, even though this clashed with Sharia laws. The third policy emerged as a reaction against Western modernity and the above two policies, and was initiated by the clergy and supported by the bazar merchants. Many of the reforms introduced were in conflict with the practices of the time, and as they were forced onto internal practices the outcome was hybrid forms where new and old coexisted uneasily. The spokesmen of the latter policy opposed changes, such as women’s education, urbanisation, industrialisation, and democracy, as they would threaten the male patriarchy dominating the country (Afary 2009: 111–112).

There are two dimensions to life in Iran: one lived in the open and conforming to the norms and pressures of society, and the other behind closed doors and in the realm of one’s home, ruled by the individual’s needs and wants. This traditional society has evolved into a modern one, with a complex form of duality ruling all levels of social activity (Kashani 2011).

In Iran, the female body and women’s rights have long been an arena for political and cultural struggles, used and misused by groups and leaders in order to pursue their own political agenda. One way, maybe the most eye-catching, has been the different policies regarding female veiling. In mid-nineteenth century Iran, veiling and sexual segregation was enforced on urban women, especially elite women who were entirely covered and used a rubandeh7 in order to cover their faces. For other groups the rules differed; tribal women were unveiled and poor rural women had a reduced version of the veil as they went about their work. There were also regional differences, with Gilaki, Kurdish, and Arab women participating in public spaces freely and often without the chador8, while women in other parts of the country had a stricter dress code. Poor urban women, who had

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7 A piece of cloth covering the face.
8 The chador is a large piece of cloth worn as a long cloak by Muslim women. It covers the woman from the head down to the feet, and is usually kept in place with one hand.
to work in order to make a living, had fewer restrictions and could leave the house without making specific excuses. They also wore looser veils, and came into contact with men more frequently (Afary 2009: 44–45).

In the early twentieth century little urbanisation took place inside Iran, but several hundred thousands of Iranians lived in Russia and neighbouring countries as workers. An additional impact from abroad came through merchants and migrant workers from Russia and Europe, and Western culture exerted an influence through new educational institutions such as missionary schools from the USA and and secular schools formed by Alliance Française and Alliance Israélite Universelle (Arasteh 1969: 164, Nikbakht 2002: 200, Ringer 2001, Shahvar 2008). Other changes were influenced by Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus, and unveiling and gender reforms were hot topics in Iran in the 1920s. These gender reforms influenced the intellectual elite in Turkey as well as Iran, and both Atatürk⁹ and Reza Shah used gender reform as a means of nation-building, modernisation, and capitalist development, in order to transform their countries into “Westernized” nations (Afary 2009: 143–144).

In the late 1930s, under the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the modernisation process came to take on new forms in Iran. As the female body has been an arena for political struggles, many of these reforms concerned specifically the situation of Iranian women, for example when public veiling became illegal between the years 1936–1941 (Afary 2009: 9, 13, 143, Chehabi 1993: 218). Had the purpose of the new regulations regarding hijab¹⁰ only been to unveil women, and erase or at least weaken gender roles, the state could have chosen to adopt the loose and colourful provincial outfits, such as those in Gilan, but instead Western European dress codes were enforced, all in order to Europeanize the country. It was also expected of Iranian women that they talk, walk and behave in a modern Western way (Afary 2009: 157).

As the religious justification regarding gender segregation weakened in the 1930s and the state encouraged women’s public participation, social regulations loosened, and a new Civil Code was introduced which further decreased the hierarchies that had sanctioned gender segregation. Little by little Iranian women asserted themselves in public spaces such as schools, clubs and other civil society institutions (Afary 2009: 9). The reforms during the Reza Shah era led to the rise of a modern middle class and an increase in the intelligentsia, groups who initially supported modernity and secular nationalist movements (Afary 2009: 146). Side

⁹ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) was a Turkish army officer, reformist statesman, and the first President of Turkey (Furubrant 2005)

¹⁰ The hijab is a veil covering the head and chest. The hijab is worn by Muslim women in the presence of adult males outside of their immediate family as a form of modesty.
by side with this new middle class, the old middle class continued to exist, consisting of the bazar merchants and the clergy. The peasants and the bazaris continued to follow the clergy and supported the system whereby religion and patriarchy dominated (Keddie 1981: 111, Chehabi 2003: 205).

By the middle of the twentieth century, Iran had become a country of “two cultures”, where the newly emerging middle class barely understood their more conservative and religious countrymen, and also believed it to be a matter of time before everyone in the country joined them and their lifestyle (Keddie 2003: 102). Urban middle-class women followed the rules dictated by this modern society by entering universities and the labour force, ignoring the old rules where parents selected partners for their children and instead they chose their own spouses and entered companionate marriages. If the marriage failed, the women filed for divorce and demanded custody of their children, something the Iranian courts were beginning to grant to mothers. Women from the old middle class, on the other hand continued to live under the old rules by observing the veil, entering arranged marriages, and more seldom pursuing higher education. They would also endure their husbands re-marrying, and hardly ever filed for divorce (Afary 2009: 11).

Another influence of Western culture entered Iran during the 1960s with television sets, purchased by both the old and new middle class. In rural areas portable projectors made it possible to broadcast films. At this point, the new generation of modern urban women started questioning and undermining the old social and gender norms of the nation, which demanded that women be dutiful daughters, faithful wives, and sacrificing mothers. Influenced by Western second-wave feminism, these women demanded new legal, economic, and individual rights, and sexual taboos were ignored (Afary 2009: 199, 221).

During the 1960s and 1970s, a major urbanisation process took place in Iran. The rural migrants left the hierarchical and social order of the countryside, and moved into cities where they experienced cultural alienation when faced with an urban industrial environment. Without any cultural affinity, many of them turned to the religious institutions affiliated with radical Islam (Afary 2009: 201). There was also a new image of Iranian women as modern portrayed by Mohammad Reza Shah’s third wife, Queen Farah, who had studied and lived abroad and supported philanthropic causes (Afary 2009: 209).

Women from the old middle classes continued to wear the chador, even though the rubandeh was no longer in use. Chadors did, however, give religious women the freedom to use public spaces as long as they behaved in a modest and chaste manner, that is, they did not laugh, speak loudly, make eye contact, or talk to men. These women may have loosened the veil around male relatives, but among strangers everything but an eye was covered. For village
women not much changed, and they continued using head cloths but no veils, and working-class women tied their veils around the waist as it gave them better mobility and freed their hands during work. However, when visiting religious gatherings and mosques, women of all classes wore their veils. In the 1970s, as opposition grew against the Shah and his reign, many young educated women started to wear the veil as a sign of resistance. Some college students began to wear headscarves pulled over the forehead to cover all hair in order to express their antagonism towards the regime as well as Westernised modernity (Fischer 1978: 192, 207–208).

By the late 1970s, the gender and modernity discourses of the early twentieth-century had been linked together. During the twentieth century the Iranian intelligentsia had looked to Europe and the West in search of ideal gender reforms, supporting women’s right to education and employment, as well as increased rights within marriage. By the 1970s this had changed and they began turning against the Western sexual revolution that was spreading to Iran, and there was a split between those who supported female emancipation and those who favoured a radical socialist and/or Islamic viewpoint. Opposition to the new gender constructs emerged among women, who believed the appeal of a Western female body was both immoral and impossible to attain (Afary 2009: 261).

The policies initiated during the Pahlavi era regarding economic development, conscription, and propaganda were ruled out as immoral and Westernized by Khomeini. Regarding women, Khomeini went even further, and condemned unveiling, mixed schools, women’s employment, and gender integration. Khomeini believed that “the unveiling of women had caused the ruin of female honour, the destruction of the family, untold corruption and prostitution” (Khomeini [1943] 1984: 311–312). Opposing both the leftist groups that Khomeini believed destroyed family values and the Pahlavi regime that promoted corrupt Western imperialism, turning women into sexual commodities, a “third way” was introduced. In this “third way”, Iranian women would be able to pursue an education and participate in the political arena, while at the same time the state would ensure that they would fulfil their duties as faithful wives and devout mothers. In this way, Khomeini did not completely break off with modernity, and showed a willingness to allow his followers a certain degree of modern lifestyle as long as it endorsed the cause. Women from both the old and the new middle classes supported this “third way” as they perceived it as a way to gain power through education and political participation, while at the same time fulfilling their religious duties (Afary 2009: 234–235, 261). The intention of the Islamist state was nevertheless to terminate the independence of the modern urban woman, since the state saw her rights and obligations only in relation to her male relatives. There would be a
strict division between the feminine and masculine roles of citizens, and a woman’s role and goal would be a harmonious marriage, where the husband dominated and was the authority, and where the wife was to bear and raise children, and attend to the housework (Kian-Thiébaut 2005: 46).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century a third generation of Iranian feminists has emerged. Where the first generation had opposed the Shah, and the second had endured the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, this third generation has grown up in an era of reforms and is set on challenging the state (Afary 2009: 332). Fashion and hijab have become feminist tools, with shorter and tighter māntos and headscarves pushed further and further back on the head showing more hair as a means of opposition. Young people have also reclaimed Muharram, and young women put on black clothing, lots of make-up and participate in gender mixed “Hussein parties” in public places where they listen to rhythmic Muharram music and exchange phone numbers with young men, all of which takes place before the eyes of the government and the morality police (Nasser 2006, Moaveni 2005: 56–59). Another tool for developing relationships between young men and women is the Internet, enabling dating and matchmaking without too much state interference, meaning that there are no online police that will supervise who young men and women talk to (Afary 2009: 333).

But it is not only the people of the cities that enjoy greater freedom and progress, a process of individualisation is also appearing in rural communities. Young rural men and women have more say in the selection of a future spouse. Nowadays, a young couple moves to their own house, thus decreasing the influence of the older generation (Afary 2009: 349). There are, however, great differences between regions; kinship marriage for example has decreased in some regions but remains prevalent in others. The lowest number of kinship marriages can be found in the province of Gilan, and the highest in the province of Sistan-Baluchestan in south eastern Iran, where the mean age of marriage for women is sixteen (Bahramitash and Kazemipour 2006: 124, Afary 2009: 348).

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11 A mānto is a coat worn over the clothing. It is more revealing than a chador, but the purpose of the mānto is nevertheless to cover up the female body as much as possible when girls and women are present in public places. A “proper” mānto is required to cover at least the behind and the thighs as well as the arms. The mānto is worn over the ordinary clothing or party clothing, in order to simplify the overall look and cover a large portion of the female body all the way from neck to knees.

12 Muharram is the Islamic month of mourning. 61 A.H. (680 A.D.), and is in Iran commemorated in remembrance of the massacre that took place in Karbala, presentday Iraq. At the massacre, Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad and the son of Imam Ali, was martyred along with his 72 followers. This event is commemorated in Iran for ten days by public chanting of elegies, theatrical representation of the events, and mourning processions (Khosravi 2008: 49).
4.5.1. The public sphere in Iran

In contemporary Iran there are many external forces and Iranians are obliged to follow a strict set of moral and social codes based on Islam, such as all women having to wear hijab, men being forbidden to wear ties, alcohol consumption being illegal, and so on. There are also social norms and trends acting as a counterbalance, and people are judged on how they look and behave; one is expected to look stylish and trendy, or else one is frowned upon in secular circles. A bearded man is assumed to be a Basij\textsuperscript{13} until proven otherwise, and yet without a beard a man cannot obtain any important government jobs (Kashani 2011).

Iranian culture is based on class, tradition, and patriarchy. For many, tradition and religion are intertwined, while class and patriarchy have been part of Iranian society since ancient times. The simplest form of class is based on income and financial status, as well as family genealogy, but modernity and traditionalism are also factors that can determine class (Price 2001). The patriarchal culture of Iran has given men more rights and privileges than women, both legally and culturally. Due to centuries of gender segregation and discrimination, there are distinct behavioural codes and rules to be regarded, and many of these are still practised, even though some have become less significant, at least in more modern and secular circles and groups (Price 2001).

The post-revolutionary social order is founded on Islamic family ethics and rules, and is a combination of the patriarchal family system, the public, and the morād/morid\textsuperscript{14} hierarchical ethos. The father guards his family, like the government guards the health and purity of the country and its citizens. The policies of the Islamic government are based on discipline, pastoral power, guidance and correction, and they are carried out by the morality police (gashte ershād) (Khosravi 2008: 31).

In theory, the version of the Islamic Sharia Laws governing Iran, forbids any man and woman to mingle, except for close family or married couple. The social rules are relaxed or tightened over time, and can be considered as dependent on the person occupying the presidency. They were, for example, more relaxed during

\textsuperscript{13} The Basij refers to a member of a paramilitary volunteer militia established in 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini, with the intention of fighting in the Iran-Iraq war. Currently this militia serves as a force engaged in activities such as internal security as well as law enforcement. The members also provide social service, organize public religious ceremonies, oversee adherence to the moral regulations of the government, and prevent dissident gatherings. Whereas Basij is the name of the force, a member is called a basiji (MacFarquhar 2009).

\textsuperscript{14} The morād/morid relationship originates from Sufism, and is a generational hierarchy where the young pupil, the morid, is taught complete obedience to the older master, the morād (Khosravi 2008: 27).
ing the presidency of Khatami (1997–2005), to be tightened in 2005 when Ahmadinejad was elected the president of Iran (Kalantari 2011). In Iranian society veiling is compulsory for all women, even foreign women visiting the country and those belonging to non-Muslim religious minorities. Penal Law was reformed in 1996, and a bad hijab was defined as “uncovered head, showing of hair, make-up, uncovered arms and legs, thin and see-through clothes and tights, tight clothes such as trousers without an overall over them, and clothes bearing foreign words, signs, or pictures” (Paidar 1995: 344).

The veil is a means to protect purity and modesty and as a tool against cultural invasion. A properly veiled woman is considered as one protecting the ideas and ideals of the Revolution, just as an improperly veiled woman is seen as a threat against the Revolution, a plot instigated by internal and external enemies. A bad hijab is punished by prison or a fine. The code of veiling does not only apply to women; it concerns men as well, but mainly in an abstract manner and by covering the parts of the body seen as immodest rather than the major part of the body. The abstract aspect of veiling concerns inner modesty and means keeping one’s inner needs hidden. One does this by not smoking, laughing or speaking loudly or talking too much. Concerning talking and voice, women must also be aware of their voices. Women can veil their voices by using formal language and a decorous tone, and by not singing, laughing loudly or engaging in emotional outbursts in public (Khosravi 2008: 45–46). Yet another aspect of veiling is gender segregation in public places, where the law declares that gender segregation must be enforced at meetings, conferences, wedding and funeral ceremonies, demonstrations, on buses, and even in the queues. In the streets, shopping centres, parks, and other public places where gender segregation cannot be enforced as easily, it is the duty of the moral police to make sure citizens follow the rules (Khosravi 2008: 46).

The public sphere is controlled by the Iranian regime and its agents, searching for religious crimes. After the revolution in 1979, it was the task of the Revolutionary Committees (komite) to monitor the public sphere and prevent any crimes as well as punish those who did not follow the laws and rules. From the beginning of the 1990s the Basij took over the role of the Revolutionary Committees. The Basij attends constant ideological and political courses in order to carry out their work better as the protectors of moral codes and to prevent corrupt behaviour (Khosravi 2008: 29–30, Keddie 2003: 235).

Gashte ershād (the moral police) patrol the city streets in their minivans making sure the people abide by Islamic dress codes, such as not wearing too tight clothes or too short māntos, not too much make-up, no nail-polish, proper veiling,
and no T-shirts for men during Islamic mourning ceremonies. Concerning the issue of gender segregation, the moral police also supervise citizens so that unmarried couples are not spending any time together and so on. Dress codes vary over time, and new rules are added depending on how fashion changes. Rules that have been added during the past couple of years have been prohibiting women from wearing trousers tucked into their boots, as it is regarded as a Western fashion whim. During 2011 other rules added included people not being allowed to bleach their hair, be (overly) tanned or wear sun glasses above their foreheads. In 2011, the Government also made a list of haircuts considered to be ideal and appropriate for Iranians. These haircuts were however only for men, as women are supposed to cover their hair (Kalantari 2011). The task of the morality police reaches beyond the public sphere as they also monitor any parties held to ensure that they are not gender integrated, and that the women attending the parties follow the dress rules and hijab regulations.

It should be added that even though girls and women are the main focus when it comes to having bad hijab, and they face being arrested by the gashte ershād, men are not excluded. Young men looking too “Western” or walking the streets with their girlfriends are just as likely to be arrested and brought to justice. Despite the constant risk of being arrested, the rules are pushed to breaking point and even broken when unmarried couples spend time together, or through too short and too revealing clothing, excessive make-up, haircuts and hair styles that governing bodies do not consider to be Islamic enough, or through organising gatherings via the social media, such as the public water fights during the summer of 2011 (Kalantari 2011).

4.5.2. The private sphere in Iran

Despite the central government’s rules and regulations, Iranians are, according to Price, very conscious-minded when it comes to the way they dress, as clothing is a marker of being either modern or traditional. Women belonging to the more modern groups have no problems with wearing heavy make-up, having their veils pushed higher up on their heads, mingling un-veiled among men, or dressing sexy and exposing their bodies when men are present. The more traditional women dress modestly and in a more conservative manner, in dark colours with long mantos or preferably chadors, wear little or no make-up, and at gender-mixed gatherings men and women stick to people of their own sex. There are, however, no restrictions for traditional women to dress sexy or add to their make-up if the gatherings are solely for women (Price 2001).
More traditional people dress more conservatively, do not drink alcohol, do not eat what is forbidden according to Islamic rules, such as pork, and they feel more relaxed when they are with people of their own gender. They are not likely to attend festivities during religious events, not dance at mixed gatherings, and observe Muslim holidays and mourning rituals. Very conservative people may also avoid all physical contact, like shaking hands with or kissing people of the opposite sex with the exception of very close family. However, it is accepted to hold hands, embrace, and kiss the cheeks of people of the same sex, whether related or not (Price 2001).

In more traditional families there might also be conflicts between the younger generation and their parents. Boys with earrings or dyed hair are considered womanly, and girls in short and tight clothing, and heavy make-up will be looked upon as indecent and offensive, to give a few examples. Parents, both the traditional and the modern ones, usually have double standards regarding their children, and are more restrictive toward their daughters than their sons in regard to individual freedom, clothing, and socialising with people of the opposite sex. Remaining a virgin until marriage is still demanded by many Iranian men and their families, while little attention is paid to sons having girlfriends or being engaged in sexual contacts before marriage (Price 2001).

For many Iranians, relationships between men and women can be a complicated issue. Here again there are differences between educated and modern groups of people and those more traditional and less educated. While the former might have few problems understanding relationship dynamics and engaging in them, as well as respecting their partners and having left more traditional courting habits behind them, the latter group might have problems with more Western dating styles. Men normally prefer to marry a virgin, and might also expect obedience from their wives, and exclude their partners from decision making concerning the family finances, for example. Wives and relationships might also be heavily controlled by the husbands, and all socializing with the opposite sex can be looked upon as offensive and corrupt (Price 2001).

Even in the private sphere, the rules are bent and broken. One way for Iranians to defy the government has been through the Internet. Even though many sites are filtered and blocked, and the speed of the Internet is at times slowed by the government, Iranians are very active online, and many Iranians push the legal limits by visiting prohibited and blocked web pages, such as Facebook or YouTube (Sreberny and Khiaabany 2010: 48). Other ways for young people to show resistance include arranging parties and discos where people of both sexes participate, or experiencing sexual encounters even though they are not married (Kalantari 2011).
5. The Rashti identity in relation to speaking Rashti

5.1. Introduction

As the city of Rasht is a bilingual community, where both Gilaki/Rashti and Persian are used. This chapter concerns the ways in which the participants relate to these languages and varieties. To ascertain what makes Rashtiness unique for the participants, it is necessary to clarify here how the word Rashti is used and defined by them. When the participants use the word Rashti, this can have three different meanings depending on the context. The first meaning of the word refers to a person born and/or raised in the city of Rasht. It can, also be used to refer to a set of features and qualities associated with the Rashti people. As the two first meanings of the word are more relevant in the following chapters, a continued discussion about them is found in chapter 6. The third meaning of the word Rashti refers to the Rashti dialect, which is a variety of the Gilaki language heavily influenced by Persian, and spoken in the city of Rasht. For further background reading concerning the linguistic aspect of the word the reader can see 4.3.2. in this study. As the participants discuss language and how they as opposed to other people speak, code-switching and active voicing are frequently used in the examples. Other discursive devices are extreme case formulations and contrasting (see 2.6.–2.7).

As can be read in chapter 2, intersectional studies often use the most common social categories such as age, class, gender, sexuality, religion, or ethnicity. However, as this study uses an emic perspective, what is important and interesting has been to see what social categories the participants themselves make relevant and discuss. Language itself is not a social category, but it becomes evident in the way the participants speak about Rashti and Gilaki speakers, that these groups are perceived by the participants as social categories, often related and contrasted with Persian speakers.

The next section, 5.2. deals with a theoretical frame concerning monolingualism and people’s opinions of different varieties in a bilingual or multilingual environment. It also concerns how men and women use languages and language varieties in order to signal status. Section 5.3. analyses how the par-
ticipants evaluate describe Gilaki and Rashti, and what social status they associate with Gilaki, Rashti and having a Gilaki/Rashti accent. While the participants discuss how speaking Rashti or Gilaki is seen as an indicator of low social class and low social status, they also discuss that this is not always the case for the young men. This is why section 5.4. investigates how and why there are different circumstances for young men and young women when it comes which language or dialect they choose to speak. The chapter is summed up with concluding discussions in section 5.5.

5.2. Language and society

Language is a means of communication, which also makes it an important part of any given society and culture. Language production is a goal-directed activity, where language is used by people to influence one another, make friends, announce information, declare affiliation etc.. All communication is produced in certain linguistic environments, contexts, which make communication easier.

Traditionally, when studying languages, researchers have considered micro- and macro-perspectives as two separate linguistic fields. Macro sociolinguistics concerns using a large-scale perspective when studying language in society, and regards the distribution of languages and their wider functions, such as language domains, language planning, educational policy etc. (Swann et al. 2004: 196). Silberstein (2001: 100) describes macro-sociolinguistics as an approach that looks at the behaviours of entire speech communities, exploring issues such as why immigrant communities retain their native languages in some social contexts but not in others, or how social identity can affect language choice. Micro-sociolinguistics, on the other hand, focuses on details in the internal structures of language, such as variation within a language, and how language is used in interaction between people (Swann et al. 2004: 205). Micro-sociolinguistics refers to research with a linguistic slant, often focusing on dialect and stylistic/register variation. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been employed to explore such linguistic phenomena as phonological differences between dialects or discourse variation between male and female speakers (Silberstein 2001: 100). There are, however, instances where macro- and micro-sociolinguistics intersect; language shift, bilingualism, acts of identity, and code-switching are topics where both approaches are used (Swann et al. 2004: 205).

According to Enfield (2005: 313), in order to understand linguistic systems, one must consider both maintenance and change within the system. Maintenance and change must also be examined both as embodied in individuals as well as
played out and observable in larger social contexts. Even though linguistic processes take place at a micro-level, it is at the macro-level that the outcomes of these processes are aggregated and conventionalized. Martin-Jones (2001) presents a framework which includes structural-functional and interpretive approaches. While a macro-perspective, is concerned with community trends in language use, language domains, and whole communities, the micro-perspective, is interested in communicative competence and the interaction in small groups. The structural-functional approach is of a quantitative nature and uses questionnaires and surveys, and has a deterministic view of society, while the interpretive model uses qualitative methods such observations and recordings, and views society in terms of active speakers. What Martin-Jones calls a critical approach combines aspects of these two, but focuses on the inter-dependence of the macro and micro perspectives. Furthermore the latter takes a dialectic view of society with an interest in power relations. The methods used in this approach are of a qualitative nature, meaning recorded staged conversations and observation.

Concerning this study, while some participants might fall under the bilingual category, this is not a study of bilingualism. The goal is not to study bilingual speech and a pattern of the use of Gilaki, Rashti and Persian *per se*, but rather to see how the participants value the different languages and varieties they come in contact with in the bilingual society in which they live, and how they link different social attributes and categories to different speech groups in that society.

Language is closely linked to class, prestige, and status, all three of which seem to play a greater role for women than men, at least from a sociolinguistic perspective. Milroy (1987: 13) describes social class as a broad, large-scale category. It may seem to be a simple idea and easy to explain, and has made it possible for linguistics to examine the social functions of language in cities, but it is in fact very difficult to approach unless consistently used at a high level of abstraction. The basic idea is that people can be grouped with respect to quantifiable characteristics such as income, education, occupation, residence, and life-style. In his Norwich study Trudgill (1974: 93–94) concluded that men were more likely to use working class speech than women. Trudgill explains this by stating that women in general, are more aware of status than men, which leads them to also be more conscious of the social importance of linguistic variables. According to Trudgill (1974: 94–95), there are two interconnected reasons for this. The first reason is that women in general have a more insecure place in society, and are subordinate to men. Since they are also aware of this, they try to secure their position in as many ways as possible, and one way is to do so linguistically. Men on the other hand are rated by their occupation and their income, in other words by what they do, while women are rated through their appearance. Since this is the
case, they need other status markers to make people aware of their position in society. And once again, the way they speak is one way to demonstrate their position. The second reason is that working-class speech is more connected to masculinity and the working-class way of life and culture is considered to be rough and tough, which are both seen as masculine characteristics. Female attributes on the other hand are refinement and sophistication, characteristics connected to the upper-class and their culture and way of life.

Nordberg (1994: 17–19) presents contrasts between urban and rural lifestyles, where city life involves a radical transformation of economic activities and occupational structure. The urbanisation process brings together people of different geographical and maybe even cultural backgrounds. People bring with them different dialects and linguistic structures, but also their expectations and intentions and how they interpret communication. Secondly, the specialisation of occupation, activities and institutions needs a certain variety of language use, in terms of vocabulary, phraseology, textual strategies and interactional norms. In order to be a part of the labour market, to safeguard their interests and uphold their rights, individuals have the need to state their cases to impersonal authorities and strangers, and to do it in the formal way demanded.

Explaining people’s choice of language, Gal (1979: 17–20, 62–63, 167–171) suggests that language shift symbolises changes in the status and gender roles of speakers, and their shifting values are associated with the language they used at first and the language they have shifted to. Gal’s work gives language and gender another interpretation and she argues against a deterministic view of women and men’s gender as the only or the dominant factor in linguistic conservatism and innovation. She argues for a more dynamic view of men and women as having variable positions in society and consciously trying to change these positions and roles. Gal also highlights aspects of the rural and urban lifestyles as she speaks about the changing language situation. In Oberwart a symbolic dichotomy was formed where the rich local elites spoke German, and the peasants spoke both German and Hungarian. Even though a prestige ranking existed and Hungarian had a low prestige in comparison to German, Hungarian was also the symbol of pride and group identity for the peasants. Gal suggests that the social changes in the last century coincide with the occurrence of language shift. This then includes the growth and diversification of the city and the recent period of unprecedented prosperity and economic expansion in Austria. This process has drawn Oberwart’s young population from an agricultural lifestyle to industrial labour. Language shift only occurred when the German language gained prestige because people chose it and conversely rejected the Hungarian language. Over time, as German was also the language of education and training, and was therefore
needed for employment of all kinds, knowing German became not only convenient but also a necessity for economic development. Over time young people accepted the higher prestige of German and mocked Hungarian since they were trying to adopt the values of German-speaking Austrian urban life.

In section 4.4., it is possible to read about the Iranian language policies during the 20th century, and how these policies stressed the one nation–one language norm. It is, however, not only in Iran that these kinds of policies have prevailed. The same thing occurred in Europe in the late 19th century and was caused by the rise of the modern state.

The rise of the modern nation state triggered the emergence of nationalist ideologies, and the belief that there are close links between ethnicity, nationality, and language (Lewis 1978: 24). There was especially pressure for a national language, and Romantic philosophers such as Herder believed language to be the essence of ethnic identification. As Bauman and Briggs (2000: 184) put it, to Herder “a nation, a culture, a polity must be homogenous; diversity is unnatural and destructive”. Despite their rarity, there was a demand for linguistically homogenous nations, and consequently a distinct national language became a standard part of national ideology (Barbour 2000: 14). With the belief in national languages comes the monolingual norm. Nevertheless, the majority of communities worldwide are bilingual or even multilingual, which in reality makes bilingualism the norm. This has been the case from a historical perspective as well, and according to Grosjean (1982: 1) “it is probably true that no language group has ever existed in isolation from other language groups, and the history of languages is replete with examples of language contact leading to some form of bilingualism”.

Nordberg (1994: 135–136) states that there are connections between the identity of a group and the language spoken by that group. Through accent, vocabulary, and discourse patterns, the identity of a group is formed and developed. A person’s social identity is central for his or her linguistic behaviour, and people use speech as a way of expressing loyalty to the ethnic or social group of which they are members. In other words, an individual’s beliefs about how he or she speaks are often considered to be connected to the way he or she wants to speak, and also which group he or she wants to be a part of. This may lead to a sense of shame and embarrassment over one’s language and culture for those who speak a language or language variety that has low prestige and is considered traditional, especially if the constant message from those in authority has been that these people have the wrong language, and the wrong culture (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998: 65). Kuusela (1980: 11–12) approaches the question by arguing that if individuals wish to have a majority group identity and distance themselves from their own group,
it is only natural that they should give up the symbols of the group. If language is the most important symbol of belonging between the members, individuals will direct some of their negative feelings towards their mother tongue. According to Jørgensen and Holmen (1997: 12) when conducting a Nordic study of language use and attitudes among immigrants in 1994, parents would make remarks such as “I want my children to speak our mother tongue pure” (meaning unaffected by the Nordic majority language), or “I cannot teach my children our language, because nowadays I myself mix the languages terribly”. Jørgensen (2005: 393–394) writes that even in situations when bilingualism is favoured, people believe the two languages should be kept apart, and be spoken “purely” and with no detectable trace of one another. This is based on the argument that if children mix their languages, they will be unable to “clean up” their language when they are among monolinguals. Jørgensen argues that this mind-set is invalid as people who have a command of different languages are more than capable of speaking one language when among monolinguals, and using another language when the situation demands.

5.3. How Gilaki and Rashti are described and evaluated

In the staged and natural conversations, it became obvious that social status and social class were a very important part of the participants’ lives, and something they were always conscious about when it came to their identities as young, modern Rashti women. As they live in a society where the Rashti dialect can be heard in the public sphere on a daily basis, it was interesting to realize that even though the participants understand the dialect, they almost never speak it. Occasionally when the participants did use the Rashti dialect it was for joking or mocking others, always followed by giggles and laughter. It became evident that in the eyes of the participants the Rashti dialect was strongly connected to social status. This section will hence investigate the opinion of the participants in regard to the Gilaki language and the Rashti dialect, and how they link these varieties with the social categories of status and class.

The first example is meant to function as a general introduction to the participants’ label of speaking Rashti or Persian with an accent, as well as their view of people who speak Rashti. This segment where the behaviour of Rashti people is described by one of the participants also includes code-switching.

Example 1. The loose Rashti dialect

We are at the Saberi residence, and the people present are the participants Kamand (K) and Samira (S), Kamand’s mother Mrs Saberi (MS) who is editing pictures at
her computer, as well the researcher (P). The participants are asked whether any of them speak Rashti. A long discussion follows regarding the status of Rashti, how the participants value the variety and compare it to other dialects and accents in Iran, as well as the reasons for their evaluation of the Rashti dialect.15

1. P: masan mixāstam bebinam kodum (.) šomā
   I wanted to see like which (.) does

2. P: hičkodum raštī harf mizani:n
   any of you speak Rashti?

3. K: na
   no

4. P: balad hasti:n
   do you know it?

5. K: [barāye šuxi
   for joking
   for joking

6. K & S: (laughing)

7. K: {šuxi o xande} (laugh[ing])
   {joking and laughing} (laughing)

8. P: [bexātere či:
   why?

9. K: {lahjaš jālebe (.) jazzābe
   {the dialect is charming (.) it’s appealing

10. K: (. ) xandedāre} (laughing)
    (. ) it’s laughable (laughing)

11. MS: yā masan mixān ramzi harf bezanan
    or if they want to speak about secret matters

12. MS: raštī harf mizanan
    they speak Rashti

13. S: (laughing)

    no you know like Rashti people always show a

15. K: qorbun-sadaqeye ham mi|ran
    lot of adoration for each other

15 A transcription key can be found on pages 8–9.
16  S:  [āre
yes

17  K:  ba:d masan aooo tī balamīsar masan
and then aooo I’d die for you sort of

18  K:  in[juri (xeili lahjeye
like this [it’s a very

19  S:  [(laughing) "āre hamīn"
(laughing) ‘yes that’s it’

20  K:  bāmazzeyiye] lahjeye šoliye
cute dialect] it’s a loose dialect you

21  K:  miduni: (.) {šol harf mizanim} (laughing)
know (.) {they speak loosely} (laughing)

22  S:  vali asan raftārafte dige dāre in mōzu
but little by little this issue

23  S:  (. ) az beyn mire ke masan bačehā raštī
(.) of children speaking Rashti is

24  S:  harf bezanān (. ) xeili [alan kamtar šode
disappearing now (. ) it’s much less now

25  K:  [na asan
no they don’t

26  K:  harf nemizanān (. ) hičvaxt (.)
speak it at all (. ) never (. )

27  K:  [asan rašti harf zadan (.)
speaking Rashti in general (. )

28  S:  [asan harf nemızan- raštī (. ) māhā (.)
they never spea- rashti (. ) we (. )

29  S:  "āre"
"yes"

30  K:  asan lahjeye raštī dāştan eybe
generally having a Rashti accent is shameful

31  K:  (laughing)

32  S:  āre dige asan yeki lahjeye
yes and if someone was to speak with a Rashti

33  S:  Raštī "(X)" vāy čeqadr lahjaš badjure (.)
accent "(X)" oh his/her accent is so bad (. )

34  S:  āxe čeq[adr bad harf mizane
how bad he/she speaks
This example begins with the participants being asked if they speak the Rashti dialect, which Kamand answers no to in line 3. They are then asked if they know it, and Kamand answers that they use the Rashti dialect for joking and laughing (l. 5 and 7), which causes both participants to laugh. The participants are asked why this is the case, and Kamand once again answers (l. 9) by stating that it is because the Rashti dialect is charming, appealing and funny, causing her to laugh once more. Even though the words used to describe the Rashti dialect, charming, appealing, and laughable (jāleb, jazāb and xandedār) (l. 9–10) may have positive connotations, none of them show respect or appreciation. In fact, sometimes positive words can be used in a way that signals mockery. Here, this can be seen as it is stated by the participants that they use Rashti only for laughs and jokes, and that the participants giggle or laugh every time they talk about Rashti (l. 5–7, 10, 13, 19, 21 and 31). In this example giggling and laughter seem to ridicule Rashti, as the participants laugh or giggle at the thought of speaking Rashti or when Kamand imitates how the Rasht people speak in line 17.

In lines 11–12 Mrs Saberi adds that the Rashti dialect is also used when people want to speak about things they want to keep secret from others, others logically being those who do not understand Rashti. The only acknowledgement of this comment is that Samira laughs (l. 13), but then the participants continue their own discussions regarding Rashti.

In line 14 there is a slight topic change as the participants start discussing people of Rasht and what they are like when they speak Rashti. This starts by Kamand explaining that people in Rasht always show a lot of adoration for each other (hamaš qorbun-sadaqeye ham miran) (l. 14–15). This can be seen as an extreme case formulation when she uses the words the whole time (hamaš), and the formulation is used to show the exaggeration of the Rashti people. Even though showing adoration might seem as positive, in this context it appears as ridiculous as it is over the top and over-dramatizes their feelings for each other. This can be seen in line 17 when Kamand uses code-switching in order to show the way she believes a Rashti person sounds when showing adoration. She says aoooo I’d die for you (aoooo ti balamisar). Aooo is a linguistic feature quite typical for the Rashti dialect and can express surprise, irritation, or when one feels overwhelmed. It is also used when a person wishes to imitate how a “typical” Rashti person
speaks, and is then used to express mockery, as is the case here.\textsuperscript{16} The code-switching here has two functions, the first being active voicing showing how the Rashti person speaks. The most important function is, however, to emphasize the point she makes in lines 14–15 regarding showing adoration. Kamand’s statements in line 14–15 and 17–18, are met with positive affirmation from Samira (l. 16 and 19), which are Samira’s way of displaying understanding and thereby strengthening the effect of Kamand’s claims. Her code-switching also causes Samira to giggle, which supports Kamand’s statement in line 7 when she said that the Rashti dialect is used for making fun and joking around. In this example the participants show that they believe the Rashti dialect is a source of amusement and laughter.

In this example, Rashti speakers and their behaviour are discussed by the participants. At first, Kamand speaks about the Rashti people as a whole, but as she continues talking it becomes clear that it is those who actually speak the Rashti dialect that she is referring to, and not the entire population of the city. In lines 14–15 she speaks about the exaggeration of emotions the Rashti show, and it continues in lines 20–21 where the Rashti dialect is discussed. There Kamand describes the Rashti dialect as cute and loose (bāmazze and šol). Again the words used to describe Rashti may sound positive, at least the word cute, but in the context one can see that it is not used in a positive way, rather the opposite. It might also sound somewhat peculiar to describe a dialect as loose, but it is because when speaking Rashti, there is a tendency to drag out the vowels, as can be seen in her utterance in line 17, when Kamand says aoooo. That the participants speak in a negative way about speaking Rashti, in part agrees with what is stated by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) and Kuusela (1980), in regard to feelings of shame and embarrassment over one’s language, and how people distance themselves from their own group and direct negative feelings towards their mother tongue. However, the situation is not in concord with these theories when it comes to their identity as Rashtis, and they speak very highly about being a Rahsti and the features of the Rashti people.

From line 20 there is a topic change as the participants start discussing the decrease in the use of Rashti, especially among their own and the younger generation, making the social category of age relevant. In lines 22–24 Samira explains that Rashti is disappearing as the children don’t speak it. Kamand strengthens

\textsuperscript{16} On one occasion I was having a conversation with two of friends, two brothers the older of whom lives in Rasht and the younger in Tehran. The brother living in Tehran was telling me about this time when his brother had visited him, and how he had told him to be sure to not say aoooo in public as this would show others that the brothers are originally from Rasht. Since aoooo is typical for the Rashti dialect, here it shows a wish to want to hide one’s origin.
Samira’s statement in lines 25–27 by saying that Rashti is not spoken at all, which is repeated by Samira in lines 28–29. In these lines the participants interrupt each other and basically repeat what the other one has said, in order to display an understanding of each other’s claims. Kamand explains the reason why the kids no longer speak Rashti in line 30 by stating that having a Rashti accent is shameful. Previous to this example, the Rashti dialect has been described as loose and a cause of amusement, and here it is labelled as _shameful_ (eyb) (l. 30). The word shameful is generally used for subjects such as sex, curse words, four-letter words, or behaviour that goes against social norms, so it is interesting that here it is a dialect that invokes such strong negative feelings and is labelled as something that is the cause of shame. To illustrate how bad it is to speak with a Rashti accent Samira uses active voicing in lines 32–34. As there is a part of the recording that is not audible, it is not clear who Samira is quoting, whether it is how someone else would react or if it is the participants themselves. Samira states that _oh his/her accent is so bad_ (.) _how bad he/she speaks_ (vāy čeqadr lahjaš badjure (.) āxe čeqadr bad harf mizane). This claim is confirmed by Kamand as she at the end of this sequence says that the accent would put one off. As she says this she is almost giggling, and it is shown how laughable the idea is. As the participants have claimed before, Rashti and a Rashti accent is amusing and used for joking. Here, it seems that the idea of others speaking with an accent is equally amusing and the cause for mockery. Apart from making their point about the amusing Rashti dialect, the participants are here invoking the monolingual norm that concerns speaking a language without any trace of another language (Jørgensen and Holmen 1997, Jørgensen 2005).

What is noteworthy in the parts when the participants discuss speaking Rashti or speaking with a Rashti accent is that they are constantly disassociating themselves from the Rashti people. The participants were born and raised in Rasht, and yet here they are speaking about the Rashti people in a way that shows disaffiliation. They do this by using words such as _Rashti people_ (l. 14), _they_ (l. 21), and _if someone was to speak with a Rashti accent_ (l. 32–33). As can be seen in the following chapters, the participants express positive feelings towards being from Rasht, while here they contrast themselves with people who speak Rashti or with a Rashti accent. They do so since they do not speak Rashti in everyday life, nor do they speak with a Rashti accent. Most importantly, they contrast themselves since speaking Rashti or with an accent are so closely linked to negative feelings.

Whereas in this example the participants mainly discussed the Rashti dialect, in the next example the participants make comparisons between the Rashti dialect and accent and the Esfahani accent.
Example 2. The solid Esfahani accent
The conversation takes place at the Saberi residence, with the participants Kamand (K), Samira (S), Kamand’s mother Mrs Saberi (MS), and the researcher (P). This example follows directly after the previous one, which ends with the participants discussing that speaking with a Rashti accent is taboo and bad. In the previous example the participants also explained that the Rashti dialect is used to make fun and joke around, but also that they believe the dialect will disappear in time since it is taboo to speak Rashti and off-putting. Here they are asked why this is the case, and they start making comparisons between the Rashti dialect and the Esfahani accent. It should be noted that even though Rashti is used both to describe a dialect and an accent, the Esfahani discussed in this example is merely an accent. It is interesting how the participants at some level equalise these two here.

1 P: bēxātere či: (.) ke masan bēxātere
   why for example (.) for example

2 P: [či: bar-
   why fo-

3 K: [xo bebin rašti harf zadan masan ye nafar
   see speaking Rashti if someone

4 K: lahjeye esfehāni dāre: (.) vali
   has a Esfahani accent (.) but

5 K: unqad tu zōqe ādam nemixore ke
   it doesn’t put you off as much as when a person

6 K: lahjeye rašti dāre vali rašti
   speaks with a Rashti accent but when someone

7 K: mixān harf bezan- rašti šol harf mizanan
   wants to speak Rashti they speak loosely

8 S: ye ju:ri [harf miz-
   they speak in a peculiar wa-

9 K: [aoooo uto nukun di ri:
   aoooo don’t do that boy

10 S & (laughing)

11 K: miduni vali masan esfehāniyā mixān
   but you know when people from Esfahan want to

12 K: esfehāni harf bezanan mohkam harf mizanan
   speak Esfahani they speak solidly
K: (.) vāse hamin {ye "ka:m"} (.) that’s why {a "bit"}

S: asan kollan raštīyām unqad be lahjašun in general Rashti people don’t

S: ehterām nemizāran respect their dialect much

K: āre (.) [āffarin yes (.) well said

S: [jā:ye dige xeili lahjašun barāšun in other places their dialect’s very

S: moheme: important to them

K: boxos ri:17 (giggle) shut up boy (giggle)

S: āre bābā masan (.). esfehāniyā har jāye yeah like (.). no matter where in the

S: donyā ke bāšan dārim sohbat mikonan world a person from Esfahan is when he speaks

S: ma- mifahmi un esfehāniye bāz hamuntori li- you understand that he’s from Esfahan he

S: sohbat mik- vali raštīyā na speaks as he always does but not Rashti people

S: (.). vaqean hamintori ke mā masxarebāzi (.). in reality the way we speak Rashti for

S: raštī harf mizanim [xode raštīāam "(X)" mocking those from Rasht as well "(X)"

K: [migam šole (.) I’m saying it’s loose (.)

K: ye lahjeye šoleyi vāse hamin it’s a loose dialect that’s why

S: xodešun hamintori šol migiran raštī they don’t take their Rashti

S: [harf zadanešuno speaking seriously either

K: [āre yes

17 boxos ri: means literally sleep boy, but is used when asking someone to shut up.
This example starts with the participants being asked why they think speaking with a Rashti accent is shameful and considered as bad. In lines 3–6 Kamand compares the Rashti dialect to the Esfahani accent, which according to her does not put one off as much as the Rashti accent does, the reason being that the Rashti dialect is loose. Kamand is backed up by Samira in line 8, who says that they (the Rashti people) speak in a certain way. Samira uses the words ye jāle:be (peculiar way), which in Persian has a negative meaning.

In line 9 Kamand uses code-switching to imitate how it sounds when a Rashti person speaks, which cause both her and Samira to laugh. The code-switching consists of with aoooo don’t do that boy (aooo uto nukun di ri:). Apart from imitation, this code-switching also functions as proving her point. In line 7, Kamand has stated that the Rashti people speak loosely, and here she uses aooo and the word ri: (boy) to illustrate this, as she drags out the vowels when speaking. Kamand makes another imitation, also using code-switching of how the Rashti
people speak in line 19 when she says *shut up boy* (*boxos ri:*) in Rashti. In these two lines Kamand uses code-switching, which in both cases is followed by laughter and giggles, as if speaking Rashti is funny. These two excerpts should not be seen as Kamand addressing the other conversation participants and asking us to shut up. Rather it should be seen, in the context of speaking about Rashti and a Rashti dialect, as Kamand showing her ability to speak Rashti. Moreover, when it is followed by laughter and giggles it proves the participants’ point as they claimed earlier in the conversation that they use the dialect to make fun and joke around. During the participant observation sessions with Kamand, it became evident that she often uses code-switching and says some words or short sentences in Rashti when she is joking around or making fun. In conclusion, the code-switching in this example is not something unusual in her speech.

In lines 11–13, Kamand develops her comparison between the Esfahani and the Rashti accent by claiming that the former sounds solid, and even though she does not end the sentence it is obvious that a solid accent is to be preferred to the loose Rashti accent. The word *mohkam* (*solid*) is usually neither positively nor negatively charged. Here, however, it is used positively as it is contrasted with the loose Rashti accent which is the cause of exaggeration, mockery, and amusement. The participants describe Rashti in a negative way to justify their negative judgement of it. This occurs since in their opinion the Rashti dialect sounds loose and funny, so that it puts one off when speaking it, whereas the Esfahani accent is described as solid, which means it that is cannot be the cause of laughter.

In lines 14–15 and 17–18 Samira states that the people of Rasht generally do not respect their dialect, while in other places their dialect is very important to them. In order to emphasize the difference she uses the words *very important* (*xeili... moheme*) (l. 17–18), when describing the importance of dialects in other places. Kamand agrees with Samira’s statement by saying *yes* (.) *well said* (*āre (.) āffarin*) (l. 16). Once again the Rashtis are compared to people in Esfahan (l. 20–25). Both in this example as well as the previous one, the participants speak in terms of *they* when they are either mocking or criticising the actions of the Rashti people. It is the Rashti people who speak in a funny manner, and it is the Rashti people who do not respect their dialect.

By claiming that it is the Rashti people who do not respect their dialect and who use it for making fun, the participants can distance themselves from the Rashti people. If *they* (the Rashti people) do not respect their dialect, then it is out of the hands of the participants, and they cannot be blamed for the prevailing norms. In this way the participants justify their own actions when they do not speak the dialect, or when they make fun of it. The only time, they affiliate themselves with the Rashti people is when Samira says *in reality the way we speak*
Rashti for mocking those from Rasht as well (vaqean hamintori ke mā masxarebāzi rašti harf mizanim xode raštīāam) (l. 24–25). She is affiliating herself with the Rashti people in such that they all mock Rashti, making it the normal behaviour of everyone in Rasht.

The fact that Rashti people do not respect their dialect is brought up by Samira who claims that an Esfahani person speaks in a way that will reveal his origin, meaning that he will speak with an Esfahani accent, no matter where in the world he is. For an Esfahani person it does not matter what others might think of him, and whether he is being judged because of this accent, but a Rashti person will speak the Rashti dialect in order to make fun of it. Samira also mentions respect for the Rashti dialect in line 34, but is interrupted before she can finish. In line 32–33 Kamand explains that the reason why no one takes speaking the Rashti dialect seriously and the lack of its importance is because it is not beautiful. She does not explain how she would define a beautiful dialect and whether the Esfahani dialect is beautiful, only that the Rashti dialect is not.

In lines 3–34, there are plenty of examples of how the participants speak in derogatory ways about the Rashti dialect, and the participants are very frank about the fact that they mock it. This can also be found in Kussela (1980) argument that people distance themselves from their own group and attack the language of that group. That the participants distance themselves from the Rashti people becomes very clear as they use words such as they (l. 57, 8, 28 and 34), Rashti people (l. 14, 23), them (l. 18, 31), and people from Rasht (l. 25) when they discuss people who speak Rashti and paradoxically even those who do not respect the Rashti dialect. Even though the participants themselves are from Rasht and are also open about not respecting Rashti, they still use the third person plural pronouns when speaking about the people of Rasht.

In lines 35–42 the sentiments towards Rashti suddenly change. The words actually I like Rashti a lot (asan man xodam raštiro xeili dus dāram) (l. 35–36) seem to be a turning point. By using the word actually, Kamand signals that she has gone too far in saying negative things about Rashti. This seems to act as a trigger for Samira, who agrees in line 37. In order to further emphasize that she actually likes Rashti, Kamand repeats herself in line 38, and is once more backed up by Samira in lines 39–40 who explains that °it’s interesting° () when someone speaks Rashti one ()°likes° it (°jālebe° () yeki rašti harf mizane ādam () °xošeš° miyād), sounding very upbeat and positive when she says this. Kamand then states with laughter in her voice that it reminds her of old times. It is not clear what she means by old times. Could it possibly be that she is remined of her grandparents who would speak it, and thus she recalls positive memories? It is, however, noteworthy that she links it to old times (qadimā) (l. 41). By saying this, the participants place
the Rashti dialect in the past, and not as something that belongs to the present. This is yet another way of justifying why they do not use the Rashti dialect, apart from making fun of it. The sequence ends with both participants laughing, which seems to be re-current behaviour when they discuss the Rashti dialect or speaking Persian with a Rashti accent. This seems fitting since the participants have stated on several occasions that they find Rashti amusing and the cause of laughter and joking.

In the following examples, the focus changes somewhat as the participants discuss the correlation between Gilaki/Rashti and status, especially how they believe a person’s status is affected in a negative way by speaking Gilaki/Rashti or with a Gilaki/Rashti accent. The first example regards Mrs Saberi recent experiences at a photo exhibition.

Example 3. The man at the exhibition
The people present are Kamand (K), Samira (S), Kamand’s mother Mrs Saberi (MS), and the researcher (P). This example follows a short discussion where Mrs Saberi has explained that the reason why the Rashti dialect is frowned upon is because during the Shah’s reign it was ridiculed. According to Mrs Saberi, the reason was that the opposition and most revolutionaries were from Gilan and Azerbaijan and in order to put mental pressure on these people, there were jokes made about the Rashti people and the Turks (as the Azerbaijani people in Iran are Turks and Turkic speakers).

1 MS: rāyej bud (. ) ba:d hamine ke alān (.) xob
   it was common (.) that’s why today (.) well
2 MS: ye lahje lahjast dige (.) yeki bā lahje
   a dialect is just a dialect (.) when someone
3 MS: (.) mā diruz xodāyā rafte budim in
   with an dialect (.) dear lord yesterday we
4 MS: namāyeš ( .) xo xeili sālon
   went to an exhibition ( .) well the room was
5 MS: por bud (. ) modire xāneye akkāsān am
   really filled ( .) the head of the
6 MS: hattā az tehrān umade bud ke man
   Photographers’ Society had even come from
7 MS: xo raftam jelō ye bār rafte budam
   Tehran and I well went to the front once I was
8 MS unjā umad goft ke xānum man aksāto
   there he came said that madam your pictures
9 MS: (.) man mibaxšiā sepide jān jān padide (.)
     forgive me dear Sepideh dear Padideh
10 MS: man čiz kardam
     that I did
11 P: xāheš mikonam na jālebe
     please no it’s interesting
12 MS: yani bebin hamašun fārsiro xub sohbat
     see everyone spoke Persian but well
13 MS: mikardan vali yeki az in akkāsā: (.) yani
     see one of the photographers (.) I mean
14 MS: {asan} ehehe (.) film ke mixāst sahne
     {like} ehehe (.) when there was a change of
15 MS: avaz beše (.) miraft ru un (.) ādam un
     scene in the film (.) he would go up (.) one
16 MS: şeddate čizo e- motevaje mišod (.) yani
     could perceive the intensity of you know (.) I
17 MS: asan (.) xeili un akkāse bozorgiyeyā
     mean like (.) he’s a very great photographer
18 MS: xeili marde bāšaxsiyatiye xeili masan
     he’s man of very good character and has a
19 MS: semat o maqāme xubi dāre (.) vali un
     high position and status (.) but I
20 MS: lahje nemidunam čerā unjā kāro xarāb
     don’t know why that accent ruined everything
21 MS: mikard (laughing)
     there (laughing)
22 K: (giggling) āre hamiše hamintore asan
     (giggling) yes it’s always like that
23 K: baziyā hamintor hastan
     some people are just like that
24 MS: yani oft mikard az moqiyat o hame čiz ino
     he just sank from that position and everything
25 MS: tahte šoār qarār midād in (.)
     about him was put into question this (.)
26 MS: lahje (.) čon bebin hame ke haminjuri
     accent (.) because see not everyone is like
Most of this example consists of Mrs Saberi giving an example of what kind of impression speaking Rashti with a Rashti accent makes. She does this by giving an account of her experiences the previous day at an exhibition at the Photographers’ Society. Exemplification is used to further strengthen the claims that speaking Persian with an accent will make others perceive one in a negative way. Mrs Saberi starts by saying that a dialect is a dialect (l. 1–2). It cannot be concluded whether she is speaking about the Rashti dialect or the Rashti accent, as prior to this comment she has spoken about the Rashti dialect and how it was ridiculed during the Shah era, and here she gives an example about speaking with a Rashti accent. In line 3 she starts telling us about an exhibition she went to the day before, and how even the head of the Photographers’ Society had come all the way from Tehran to be present there. By speaking about the head of the Photographers’ Society, Mrs Saberi is setting up the scene for the rest of conversation participants to understand that the exhibition was important, and thus there was a need to speak and behave accordingly. This can be further understood in line 12 as she points out that everyone present spoke Persian. However, when it was time for scene changes, one of the photographers, a man described by Mrs Saberi as a very great photographer a man of very good character and has a high position and status (xeili un akkāse bozorgiyē xeli marde bāšaxsiyatiye xeli masan semat o maqāme xubi dāre) (l. 17–19), stood in front of everyone and spoke Persian with a Rashti accent.

By describing the photographer in such a positive way and stressing the word very (xeili) twice, Mrs Saberi is setting the scene for the contrast that follows. After explaining all of this, the contrast begins as she tells us about how the photographer in question spoke Persian with a noticeable accent (l. 20). However, as he spoke (Persian) with a Rashti accent in front of the crowd, all of that would be ruined, showing what a negative impression the accent of the photographer in question made. She ends her turn by laughing, which should not be seen as her way of mocking the photographer, but rather a laugh of embarrassment. Either she is embarrassed on behalf of the photographer in question, or she feels embar-
rassed for feeling and speaking about him the way she does. That she feels embarrassed on his behalf can be seen through the way he was described in the beginning: a man of great character and high position, and then how all of this was for nothing when he stood in front of everyone present and spoke with a Rashti accent. In Mrs Saberi’s opinion this is embarrassing as it threw everything into question.

Even though status is only mentioned once in this example, I believe that it can be perceived as a social category as the participants also mention good character, being good at one’s job, and enjoying a high position, which are all qualities linked to high status. This means that according to the participants, regardless of one’s character and competence, and one’s status and position in society, speaking with a Rashti accent is linked to being perceived as having no status. Conversely, the social category of status is linked to people who speak Persian with no trace of a Rashti accent. This is briefly mentioned at the end of Mrs Saberi’s statement as she explains that the (negative) impact of having a Rashti accent on how one is perceived causes people not to want to speak with an accent. Similar statements are made by other participants as they claim that people in Rasht make sure to speak accent-free Persian, since having an accent has a negative effect on how they are perceived and judged by their peers.

In lines 22–23 Kamand aligns with Mrs Saberi by giggling and saying that some people are always like that. From line 24 Mrs Saberi continues her exemplification of the effects an accent can have on a person’s whole image. Her statements here suggest that speaking Persian with a Rashti accent has such a negative impact on a person’s status that no matter how skilled one is, or how high a status one has, it manages to have a negative impact. Social norms have a strong influence on the linguistic varieties people choose.

In lines 26–30 Mrs Saberi tries to explain that the reason why speaking with a Rashti accent would make others judge you negatively is because there are so few who are like this (speak Persian with a Rashti accent) that there is an impact (she does not, however, end this sentence). She also claims that this is the underlying reason why they don’t want to speak with an accent. They are to be seen as the majority who speak without an accent, since speaking with an accent apparently has negative impact on how one is perceived by others.

This entire example is a good illustration of the significance of the monolingual norm, and how Mrs Saberi speaks about the importance of keeping two languages apart. The monolingual norm in this society seems so dominant that no matter what kind of person one is and no matter how much status and prestige one has, it will all be lost if one is unable to speak “purely”.
The following example concerns how Minoo and Yalda, two upper-class girls, discuss the future of the Rashti as well as how it does not go well with their style to speak Rashti.

Example 4. Speaking the Rashti dialect does not match up with our clothes and looks

The people partaking in this conversation are Minoo (M), Yalda (Y), and the researcher (P), and it takes place at Yalda’s home in Golsar. In this example the participants are asked about their opinions and knowledge of Rashti. The participants have been asked if they speak Rashti, and both say no. Yalda also explains that not many speak Rashti dialect these days. The participants are asked why and this is what follows:

1 Y: man ke asan dust [“nadāram”]
   I personally ‘don’t’ like it at all

2 M: [xeili kam (.) xeili kam
      very few (.) very few

3 M: (. ) fek nemikonam ke (. ) tā čand
      (.) I don’t think that (.) in the next

4 M: sâle āyande:
    few years

5 Y: vali lahje dāran ā:
    but they speak with an accent though

6 M: “lahje”
    “accent”

4 Y: masan kelāse mā: xeili kam piš miyād
    in our class for example it hardly ever happens

5 Y: yeki lahje dāšte bāše (. ) unāiam ke
    that anyone speaks with an accent (.) and those

6 Y: lahje dāran mamulan [unāyi
    who speak with an accent

7 M: [az atrāfan yā
      they come from outside

8 M: [masan qesmatāye pāyintar
      the city or for example the low class areas

9 Y: [hastan ke (. ) eh āre pāyintar hastan
      are those those who (.) uh yes the low class

10 M: o inā vali xob (. ) inām be zudi az
     areas and such but well (.) this will also
beyn mire miduni čerā: bexātere inke tu disappear soon you know why? because

their families speak Rashti to a higher degree

and they have acquired an accent (.). but in

the next few years their kids won’t ever

have an accent because because everyone will

speak Persian it will gradually

become the norm (.). it will become accent-free

in jā miofte dige (.). qaliztar mišē

dig. I dislike Lori as well

ke lahješun xeili eftezāe vali hamešun

where they’ve a really awful accent but they all

there are lots of other cities where

people have a really terrible accent but they

mizanan (.). vali mā dige engad ruš taasob

speak (.). but well we’re so fanatical

towards it (.). don’t speak like this

it’s unsophisticated it doesn’t suit your style
Yalda answers the question why not many people speak Rashti by expressing her personal sentiments as regards the Rashti dialect, which is that she does not like it, stressing that she does not like it by adding *at all* (l. 1). She does not, however, explain the reasons for her dislike. Before she can explain any further she is interrupted by Minoo answers that that *very few* (*xeili kam*) (l. 2) speak Rashti, which she repeats and the second time stresses the word *very* (*xeili*) (l. 8), in order to emphasize how few there are who speak the Rashti dialect. She then starts speaking about how she believes progress will be in the next few years, but is interrupted by Yalda who brings up the subject of people speaking Persian with an accent (l. 5), which is quietly repeated by Minoo in line 6. Y continues and gives an example of how it is in their class, where according to her few speak with an accent. Then she tries to make a contrast with those who speak Persian with an accent and those who do not by bringing up location of residence (l. 7). In lines 7–10 Minoo relates speaking with an accent to those who come from outside Rasht, most likely villagers as the word *atrāf* (l. 7) which is translated as *outside*, here refers to the countryside. Class is also highlighted as Minoo continues by mentioning the low class areas, and is backed up by Yalda in line 9, who also makes class relevant by making a short remark about the low class areas. By using the pronoun *they* (l. 7), Minoo contrasts herself and Yalda with those who live in these specific areas and who speak with an accent. This is done since neither of the participants speaks Persian with an accent, and they both live in one of the richest areas of the city. To show that Minoo is correct in her statement, Yalda agrees in line 9 and repeats low class areas, showing interactional alignment.

In the following lines (l. 14–17), Minoo brings up the social category of age as she first explains that the reason some people speak with an accent is because their families speak Rashti, and this influences the accents of others. She then continues by predicting that in the future kids will speak without an accent as speaking Persian will be the norm. According to Minoo, as the young generation abandons
speaking the Rashti dialect, in the future the children will never speak it and will therefore not have an accent. What Minoo is saying is that the social norms of Rasht have been pushing and will continue pushing towards language shift. Like in the previous examples, this highlights the participants’ beliefs of how languages should be kept apart, and unaffected by each other.

In line 19 there is a topic change as Minoo starts comparing the situation to Mazandaran and Lorestan, two provinces where people, besides Persian, speak Mazandarani and Lori. According to Minoo, in these provinces, in many other places (l. 19–21) and in many other cities (l. 24), people also speak with what she calls a really awful accent and a really terrible accent (lahjašun xeili eftezāe and xeili lahjeye gandi) (l. 23 and 25), but where people continue to speak with an accent regardless. Rasht is contrasted here with these other places as a city where people are abandoning their dialect and accent in order to speak accent-free Persian. What is interesting is how accents are labelled here as Minoo uses the word really awful and really terrible to describe what it sounds like when a person speaks with an accent. It is not only the Rashti accent that is frowned upon, but the accent influenced by other Iranian languages and dialects are perceived as equally awful. This highlights what is repeated by participants in the different groups, that speaking Persian with an accent is perceived as very negative, the Esfahani accent being the only exception ever mentioned by the participants (see example 2. “The solid Esfahani accent”).

Minoo offers a reason for the differences in lines 26–27 by saying we’re so fanatical towards it (vali mā dige enqad ruš taasob dārim). As she has previously contrasted the situation in Rasht with other places in Iran, one would think that she is speaking about Rasht at large when she says we (mā), but in the sentences that follow it seems that she is speaking about herself and probably Yalda too. In lines 27–30 she uses active voicing to illustrate how a faceless other would hypothetically speak to her in regard to speaking Rashti. By using active voicing in this situation Minoo can keep her own position by claiming that it is not only her opinion about Rashti that is negative, but that she is also told this by others. According to Minoo, she is told that it is unsophisticated and does not suit her clothes and looks to speak Rashti or with a Rashti accent. This also makes visible the power structures in the Rashti society, where speaking Rashti is stigmatised, frowned upon, and seen as not agree with sophisticated clothing, style and appearance.

Apart from the active voicing, the words used for labelling speaking Rashti are also worth paying attention to. Here speaking Rashti is associated with being unsophisticated and certain clothes and looks (l. 27–30). When asked what kind of clothing and style she is referring to, Minoo answers sophisticated (bākelās) (l.
In Persian the word bākelās refers to a person who has a high level of sophistication and is refined. The word bikelās that is used in line 28, and that is associated with speaking Rashti, is consequently used to describe someone who is unsophisticated and unrefined. According to Minoo, other people label speaking Rashti as unsophisticated and ill-fitting with the clothes and style of a refined person, which is the reason why she (and others in her position) are sensitive towards it and feel pressured to avoid speaking it. The subject of sophistication and its link to what language or dialect a person speaks is also present in the following example, where the participants discuss the future of Rashti.

Example 5. It’s a low status thing
Minoo (M), Yalda (Y), and the researcher (P) are at Yalda’s home in Golsar. This example follows directly after the previous one. The participants are asked about their opinions regarding the future of Rashti as they have claimed that in the future speaking accent-free Persian will be the norm.

1 P: mmm vali fek mikonin ke xube ke masan
    mmm but do you think it’s good that

2 P: rašti az beyn mire:
    Rashti will like disappear?

3 M: be nazare man dorost nist na
    to my mind it’s not right no

4 P: čerā:
    why?

5 M: xob bexātere inke inā: (. ) ye baxši az
    well because these (. ) it’s a part of

6 M: šahre mā:st (. ) ye baxši az ostāne mā:st
    our town (. ) it’s a part of our province

7 M: (. ) mese xeili az čizā čerā ostānāye dige
    (. ) like lots of things why must other provinces

8 M: bāyad hefseš kona:n (. ) ye seri čizās (. )
    protect it (. ) there are some things (. )

9 M: vali xob (. ) xodam hič vaxt hāzer nistam
    but well (. ) I myself would never be willing

10 M rašti sohbat konam (giggle)
    to speak Rashti (giggle)
When asked if they believe the Rashti dialect disappearing is good, Minoo answers that she does not believe it to be right, as it is a part of their town and province. She compares the situation in other provinces with that of Gilan, and claims that in other places people protect their dialects, as if to say that the same should be done in Rasht and Gilan. By complaining about it, Minoo is showing resistance towards the current situation in Gilan. However, she goes on to say that she would never speak the Rashti dialect and giggles. Her opinion about the need to save the Rashti dialect while she herself refuses to speak it can be seen as paradoxical. This can be seen in several of the examples, where the participants speak on behalf of the Rashti dialect and Gilaki language on the one hand, and on the other hand laugh at the dialect and language, use them to make fun, and/or imitate the way people sound when they speak Rashti or Gilaki. In lines 3 and 5–10, one can detect invisible power structures. This can be seen through the fact that Minoo believes it would be wrong if Rashti would disappear and how she sees it as part of their town and province. However, as she herself is not willing to speak it, the stigmatisation of the Rashti variety becomes clear. Even in cases where the participants

\[18\] The question is addressed to Yalda.
express positive feelings towards Rashti, there are still negative features con-
connected to the variety, such as being very unsophisticated and very rural (l. 14–15) which prohibit the participants from speaking Rahsti.

Since Yalda has expressed very negative opinions towards Rashti throughout the conversation she is asked about her thoughts on the matter (l. 11). However, Minoo continues to speak, at first by stating that speaking Rashti is something they are used to seeing as low status. Being used to something is another way of describing norms and accounting for one’s own behaviour. She then continues by relating Rashti to being rural (l. 15), which is also perceived as very unsophisti-
cated (l. 14–15). Relating Rashti to being rural was made in the previous example as well. The difference is that while in the previous example, the discussion concerned speaking with a Rashti accent, this example regards speaking the Rashti dialect. Thus, people who belong to the category Rashti speakers are seen and described as people of low status, living in the countryside and being unsophisti-
cated.

Minoo also makes connections between speaking the Rashti dialect, on the one hand, and class, status, and place of residence, on the other. According to her, speaking the Rashti dialect indicates that the speaker has low status, and belongs to either the lower class or is from a village. The participants are asked how they can tell that speaking the Rashti dialect is low class and rural, and Minoo answers that’s just the way it is (. . .) then there is also behaviour (. . .) isn’t it? (hamin juriye dige (. . .) rafārāam hast dige (. . .) mage nist:) (l. 18–19). This question could be seen as open, but in reality it is a rhetorical one, used by Minoo to show that she is right in the matter. Not only is it the way people speak (Rashti) that classifies them as low class and rural, the way these people behave is also an indicator of having low class and being rural. This rhetorical question shuts the door for any possible contradictions and discussions. That the discussion is put to an end can be seen by the fact that both participants leave the subject, and start speaking about Yalda’s mother who is from Mazandaran.

In this example the participants bring out two aspects of Rashti. The first is that it has low status, is unsophisticated, and that they themselves are not willing to speak it. Once more the participants in this study describe the Rashti dialect as lacking prestige and being the cause of embarrassment, which agrees with what is stated by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) and Kuusela (1980). The other aspect is that like in the previous example, Minoo links speaking Rashti to being rural. That one language is linked to being rural can also be seen in Gal (1979) where the young people of Oberwart linked speaking Hungarian to being rural.

Here, Minoo has claimed that she feels it would be a shame if Rashti were to disappear and at the same time that she is not willing to speak it. In other parts of
the staged group conversation, these two participants have claimed that they un-
derstand almost no Rashti. Living in a Gilaki speaking environment, and yet
claiming that one understands no Rashti is something Lida speaks about in the
following example.

Example 6. We all understand Gilaki
Lida (L) and the researcher (P) have met at Lidas’s home for the recording of the
staged conversations. Prior to this example Lida has explained that young Rashti
women usually do not do not speak Gilaki while it is not a problem for young
men. It is important to mention, that when asked about this the word Rashti is
used, but in her answers Lida speaks about Gilaki.

1 P: fekr mikoni barâye či intoriye:
why do you think it’s like this?
2 L: ye dalileš migam hamun em dalile farhangi
I’m telling you that one reason um cultural
3 L: masan ofte kelâse (.). baziyâ masan
reason like decrease in status (.). like some
4 L: hattâ migan ke vâ:y to mag- (.). eh masan
even say oh you eve- (.). uh you like
5 L: motevajeh miši gilakiro: (.). masan man
understand Gilaki (.). I don’t understand any
6 L: asan motevajeham nemišam dar surati ke (.).
of it19 even though (.)
7 L: asan emkân nadâre man ye jâ zendegi
it’s not possible for me to live
8 L: kona:m (.). bâbâ mâmânam gilaki harf
somewhere (.). and my parents speak Gilaki
9 L: bezanan bad masan man hâlim naše (.).
and then for example I would not understand (.)
10 L: asan dige (.). tâ in hadd nist ke âdam
for example (.). it’s not like you
11 L: motevaje naše
wouldn’t understand any of it
12 P: vali āxe čerâ ofte kelâse:
but why does it lower your status?

19 This is said in a snobbish tone.
As Lida has explained that the majority of young women do not speak Gilaki, she is asked why this is the case. She answers that there is a cultural reason (dalile farhangi) (l. 2–3), which she further explains constitutes a decrease in status. According to Lida, not only speaking Gilaki, but also understanding it is seen as something that leads to a decrease in status. In order to avoid this, people claim that they do not even understand Gilaki, which is illustrated in lines 2–6 as Lida uses active voicing (oh you eve-) (u.h you like understand Gilaki (.) I don’t understand any of it (vā:y to mag- (.) eh masan motevajeh miši gilakiro: (.) masan man asan motevajeham nemišam). Lida also changes the pitch in her voice to a more snobbish and upper-class way of speaking in the active voicing, as if to emphasize that those pretending not to understand the Gilaki language, are very keen to appear and sound as if they have “high status”. Lida is indirectly questioning the people she quotes when she claims that it is impossible to live in an environment and have others speaking Gilaki, and still claim that one does not understand even a word of the Gilaki language. What Lida is saying is that these young people she
quotes understand Gilaki but as it is so stigmatized, it is natural for some to pretend not to understand it in order to appear as if they have high social status.

In line 12 Lida is asked how speaking Gilaki lowers one’s status, to which she responds that she does not know (l. 13), which should be seen as an indication of uncertainty. Lida then continues that maybe it is because how it is viewed, but that she believes it to be very complicated. She then tries to give an example by once again bringing up cultural factors (l. 15). This time, however, she changes focus and gives the Turks as an example of a group of people who are ridiculed, and makes an attempt to compare the Turks and Gilaks but changes subject before she comes a conclusion. Here, Lida tries to explain that the association between Gilaki and low status is that it is being ridiculed (l. 16–18). In conversations with other participants there has been a tendency to bring up the situation of the Turks and compare them to the Gilaks. In all of the comparisons, the participants have talked about how these two groups have been the target of mockery and ridicule. In one place, Mrs Saberi explained that this has been going on since the Shah era, and that it was a conscience strategy of the central government as the Gilaks and the Turks were in opposition and objected to the Shah. By ridiculing the Turks and the Gilaks, the goal was to put mental pressure on them. This shows that in the mind of the participants the norms in society see the Turks and Gilaks and their respective accent/dialect/language in negative terms.

Along with some other examples, this excerpt shows that there is ambivalence to Rashti and Gilaki. On the one hand, the participants make fun and speak of it in a degrading manner, and claim that others ridicule Rashti and Gilaki and do not take it seriously either. On the other hand, the participants in this study at times express a more positive attitude and even lament a possible future loss.

Lida changes subject in line 19 and states that ever since she got involved in the theatre, folklore and provincial culture, her viewpoint has changed (l. 19–23, but that there are other young people who do not share her way of looking at the Gilaki dialect. By speaking about her experiences and her new viewpoint, Lida disassociates herself from those who perceive the Gilaki dialect as an indicator of low status.

5.4. The relationship between language usage and gender

While speaking to the participants about the correlation between the Gilaki language and the Rashti dialect and their correlation with status in 5.3, they would also discuss how there are different expectations of young men and women when it comes to speaking Rashti or Gilaki or Persian with an accent. The participants
talk about how the social norms that would prevent them from speaking Rashti or Gilaki or Persian with an accent in order to not be perceived as low class or having low status would not be applicable when it came to young men. As was shown in example 3 “The man at the exhibition”, this is not always the case, and even men can be the target of embarrassment and ridicule when speaking with an accent. Nevertheless, the participants would generally express that it is easier for men to speak Gilaki or Rashti and yet not lose face or status. This is why this section will investigate how these differences are part of the identity of young Rashti men and women, and the underlying reasons.

In the first example, the participants discuss how gender and class work together when it comes to whether or not a person speaks Gilaki, with a Gilaki accent, or accent-free Persian.

Example 7. The high class guys can speak Gilaki
Roya (R) and the researcher (P) are at the home of one of my close relatives and as we have discussed different economic classes, Roya is asked whether one can see from their behaviour which class someone belongs to.

1 P: xob az tar- tarige harkāt četo:r (.) masan
   ok how abo- how about behaviour (.) do you for
2 P: motevaje miši ke bālāšahriyā
   example understand if people from high class
3 P: ye jur harf mizanan yā harkātesun
   areas talk in a certain way or do they behave
4 P: yejurie yā jāhāye xāssi miran:
   in a certain way or go to special places?
5 R: aksaran doxtarāye eh (.) payinšahri
   usually the girls uh (.) from lower town
6 R: nemidunam šāyad be dalile inke eh eh tuye
   I don’t know maybe because uh uh in more
7 R: xānevādehāye qadimitar sonnatītār
   more old-fashioned more traditional families
8 R: hanuz mardom eh be gilaki sohbat mikonan
   people still uh speak in Gilaki
9 R: aksaran doxtarāye sath- xānevādehāye sathe
   usually the girls from lev- low level area
10 R: pāyin lahjeye kāmelan gilaki dāra:n (.)
    families have a distinct Gilaki accent (.)
11 R: dar surati ke xānevādehāye levelāye in case of the higher level families
12 R: bālātar kamtar piš miyād doxtari ke (.) it happens more rarely that a girl (.)
13 R: pesar hast ā: hattā masan there are guys there are for example even
14 R: pesarāye puldāri ke lahe dāran yā hattā rich guys who have a distinct accent or even
15 R: rašti harf mizanan vali doxtarāye speak Rashti but rich and
16 R: servatmand o bākelās o inā xeili kam sophisticated girls and those it’s very
17 R: piš miyād ke lahjeye gilaki dāste bāšan uncommon for them to have a Gilaki accent
18 P: čerā farq mikone (.) beyne masan why is there a difference (.) for example
19 P: pesarā o doxtarā: between guys and girls?
20 R: nemidunam (.) masan pesarā: xe- hattā tuye I don’t know (.) for example guys ve- even
21 R: šuxihāšun bā hamdige: (.) masan say things like when they joke around (.) they
22 R: migam bušu re: masan miduni čī ma- can say get lost dude you know what li-
23 R: xeili bā ham (.) be žabāne gilaki šuxi together it’s a lot of (.) they joke around in
24 R: mikonan (.) bā ham eh vaxti ke dāran the Gilaki language (.) together uh when they
25 R: davā migiran hattā un fošāye nāmusi ke be fight even those honour curses
26 R: ham midan gāhi ogāt mibini foše they use sometimes you can see it’s Gilaki
27 R: nāmusi gilakiye yani rasman ye fārs aslan honor curses meaning a Persian can’t earnestly
28 R: motevaje nemiše šomā dārid be ham foš understand you’re cursing
29 R: midid (.) vali xob doxtarā masan hamčin each other (.) but well for girls these
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30 R:  \( \text{e:h} \) guruhāyi nadāran (.) in (.)  
\( \text{u:h} \) they don’t have \textit{those} groups (.) these (.)

31 R:  māfyāhāro beyne xodešun nadāran  
they don’t have those kind of mafia groups

32 R:  māfyāye šuxiye gilaki  
among themselves \textit{a Gilaki joking mafia} for

33 R:  masan (.) eh in jamāro doxtarā ŝon  
\( \text{example (.) uh since girls don’t} \)

34 R:  nadāra:n va ba: az ye su  
\textit{have these kinds of groupings} and then there’s

25 R:  čonke eh nemidunam čerā hamiše fek mikonan  
the \( \text{uh I don’t know why} \) \textit{being} they always think

36 R:  ke (.) gilak budan ye jur masan  
\( \text{that (.) being} \) \textit{Gilaki} is kind of

37 R:  eh eh šane ādamo miyāre pāyin (.) masan  
\( \text{uh uh it brings down one’s status (.) for} \)

38 R:  šomā vaqti sedā o simāye irān eh dārid  
\textit{example when you watch the Iranian} \( \text{uh} \)

39 R:  negāh mikonid (.) seriyālāyi ke az  
national channels (.) the TV shows

40 R:  šabakeye sarāsari paxš miše mamulan  
broadcast \textit{nationally usually}

41 R:  kāregarā bāqebunā  
\textit{the working class man} \textit{the gardeners the}

42 R:  darbunhā rašti sohbat mikonan (.)  
\textit{servants and the janitors speak Rashti (.)}

43 R:  yani kolfatā va masan šomā hič vaqt  
\textit{meaning you will for example never}

44 R:  nemibinid ye doktore jarāhe pelāstiki ke  
\textit{see a plastic surgeon who}

45 R:  lahjeye gilaki dāšte bāše tuye seriyālā  
\textit{has a Gilaki accent} in the TV shows

46 R:  (.) aksaran tuye: injuri bar- (.) dar  
(\textit{usually in these pro- (.) about})

47 R:  morede hameye aqvām (.) masan mā  
\textit{all different ethnic groups (.) for example we}
Roya is asked if one can decide from another person’s behaviour, speech and the places they go to if he or she belongs to the high-class areas. She responds that the young women living in the poorer areas come from families who are more old-fashioned and traditional and thus speak Gilaki, resulting in the girls from these families speaking with a Gilaki accent is used. Roya associates category-bound attributes such as more old-fashioned and more traditional (qadimitar and sonnattiar) (l. 7) and category-bound activities such as speaking Gilaki or with a Gilaki accent to people living in the poor areas (l. 5–10). Like in example 4 “Speaking with the Rashti dialect does not match up with our clothes and looks”,

48  R:  (.r) rājebe torkā jok misāzim (.r)
       (.r) make up jokes of Turks (.r)

49  R:  mas- "migim" torkā xengan
       li- "we say" the Turks are idiots they don’t

50  R:  hiči nemifahman (.r) hamuntor rājebe raštīā
       understand anything (.r) similarly we make

51  R:  jok misāzim migim
       up jokes about the Rashtis we say

52  R:  bigeyratan va masan xeili masxarašun
       they’ve got no honour and we ridicule

53  R:  mikonim (.r) in tasvirī ke (.r) bačehāye
       them (.r) this image that (.r) this feeling

54  R:  gilak behešun dāde šode ehsās mikonan
       projected on young Gilaks makes them feel that

55  R:  masan man age ye jāyi befa- kasi motevajeh
       if somewhere unde- someone understands

56  R:  beše man gilakam barāye man xeili bade
       that I’m Gilak it’s gonna be really bad for me

57  R:  (.r) va čon doxtarā mamulan xeili
       (.r) and since girls are usually more

58  R:  hassāstaran digarān čejuri rājebešun fek
       sensitive to what others think of

59  R:  mikonan (.r) unā xeili fek mikonam bištar
       them (.r) they think they should work

60  R:  ruye lahjeye xodešun kār mikonan (.r) say
       more on their accent (.r) they try

61  R:  mikonan doros sohbat konan
       to speak properly
the participants in this example highlight the social categories of class and age, in addition to gender when it comes to how people speak. When asked about the behaviour of upper-town people, Roya immediately starts speaking about the girls from the lower town, and how these girls speak with a Gilaki accent as their families speak in Gilaki (l. 6–8). Roya is contrasting herself with these people and the attributes and activities she associates with them. She does this as she neither lives in the low-class areas of the city, nor speaks Persian with an accent, but she does this as she speaks about the low-class girls and the traditional and old-fashioned families these girls belong to.

However, from line 11 there is a slight change when Roya goes on to contrast the low-class girls and families with the girls from the higher levels and their families, stating that it is rarer for rich and sophisticated girls to have a Gilaki accent. It should be noted that while the families from the lower town were described as traditional and old-fashioned, the girls from the upper town are described as sophisticated, which can be seen as the opposite of traditional.

Gender then becomes relevant as it is explained by Roya that there are guys who have a distinct Gilaki accent and who might even speak Rashti (l. 13–15). The rich guys are contrasted with the rich girls as Roya explains that while there are few young upper-class women who speak with a Gilaki accent, it is not uncommon for the young upper-class men.

When Roya is then asked why there is a difference between young men and women (l. 18–19), she starts by saying that she does not know, but then continues by saying that when guys joke around they can use Gilaki. She then uses active voicing and code-switching to give an example of this in line 22 when she says get lost dude (bušu re:), in order to show what it can sound like when young men joke around. When speaking about the young men and the use of Gilaki, Roya at first claims that it is used for joking around, and then adds that they also use it when fighting and cursing. The difference, according to Roya, lies in the fact that young women do not have the same kind of groups, or mafias as she calls it, where they can joke around or speak to each other in the Gilaki language (l. 29–34). However, using a specific language and cursing is constructed as part of being male. In other examples, the participants have said that Gilaki and Rashti are used for joking and making fun, and have demonstrated this code-switching. In this example cursing and bad language are brought up and added to the situations when a person can use Gilaki. It is, however, only mentioned as something men do, especially when they are in groups or fighting. Cursing and fighting are usually activities linked to men and male behaviour, which is also the case here. Here, Roya constructs what it means to be a man by describing young men as more prone to using foul language as well as speaking in Gilaki when they do so.
When it comes to the literature regarding how men and women speak (Trudgill 1974), this example is not as clear-cut as some literature proposes. Trudgill (1974) suggests that women are more likely to respond to overt, standard norms, which in this case should be Persian. Roya claims that the young women from the lower parts of Rasht are more likely to speak with a Gilaki accent, while the same cannot be said about the girls belonging to the upper-class. The explanation Roya gives to why the girls from the lower parts have an accent is that their families speak Gilaki, and this has influenced the speech of the girls. The gender aspect does, however, become visible as she explains that there is a difference between the young upper-class men and women, as the young men are more likely to speak Gilaki, while there are few upper-class young women who would do so. The gender aspect as well as the monolingual norm becomes evident at the end of this sequence as Roya explains that young women try to speak properly, which in this case means speaking Persian without an accent.

Roya tries to explain why she considers the Gilaki language to be so stigmatized, and perceived as an indicator of low class. She explains how speaking a certain dialect or belonging to a specific ethnic group will bring shame and embarrassment as the society at large sees you as a person of low class and status and the object of ridicule. The reason she gives is that different ethnic groups — and again here the Turks are given as an example besides the Gilaks — are ridiculed and presented as people with low-status occupations, such as working men, gardeners, servants and janitors (l. 41–42) by the Iranian national channels which are controlled by the government. This can be explained through the language policies of Iran during the 20th century, and how these policies have portrayed Persian as the national language. These state policies have resulted in the belief that the minority languages are not good enough in comparison to Persian. The image of Gilaks as servants, gardeners, and janitors also references the social category of age, as Roya describes in line 53–56 that young Gilaks prefer to keep their Gilaki identity hidden as the feelings of dishonour and ridicule are projected onto them through the propaganda of national TV broadcasts. The way Gilaki speaking people are described on TV is also an example of power structures and inequity in the Iranian society.

This sequence with Roya returns to the topic of why young Rashti women do not want to speak the Gilaki language or Persian with a Gilaki accent. Roya speaks for all Rashti girls as she claims that the reason why girls are less prone to speak Persian and thus hide that they are from Gilan is that they are more sensitive to what others think of them and perceive them. By claiming that it is the young women who are more sensitive, the social category of gender is once more made relevant in relation to speaking with an accent. By speaking for all these girls and
using a common voice, she contrasts the young women with the young men, and justifies the choices young women make when they work more on their accent. They try to speak properly (bištar ruye lahjeye xodešun kār mikonan say mikonan doros sohbat konan) (l. 59–61). Not only does she contrast young women with young men, she also uses words with quite a different sound to them. While male speech is associated with Gilaki and cursing, female speech is labelled as speaking properly and trying to speak without an accent. Even though she does not explicitly say what speaking properly and working on one’s accent means, one can conclude from the context that it concerns speaking accent-free Persian. So while Gilaki is indirectly associated with something negative, it is contrasted with Persian which is perceived as positive.

A similar notion can be seen in the following example where Lida contrasts men with women and discusses why a higher number of young Rashti men speak Gilaki compared to the young Rashti women.

Example 8. Girls must speak pure Persian
The people present in this example are Lida (L) and the researcher (P). We have met at Lida’s home, and here she is talking about the difference between young men and women when it comes to language use.

1 P: āre (. ) eh (. ) xob harf bezanim (. ) ham-yes (. ) uh (. ) well let’s talk (. ) tha-
2 P: hamino mixāstam beporsam (. ) masan ādam that’s what I wanted to ask you (. ) if one were
3 P: moqāyese kone (. ) hamin zabānhāye eh eh to compare (. ) these languages uh uh
4 P: kelāse zabān o in čizā (. ) ādam the status of language and things like (. ) that
5 P: masan bege ke masan for example if one were to say for example
6 P: čon barāye man jālebe kiyā hastan because for me it’s interesting who
7 P: tuye irān (. ) ke (. ) kiyā hastan tuye these are in Iran (. ) that (. ) who are these in
8 P: gilān dige fārsi harf mizanan eh raštī Gilan that speak Persian uh don’t
9 P: harf nemizanan va čerā [Rashti speak Rashti and why Rashti
[be nazare man alân in my view nowadays

aksaran farsi em harf mizanan ba:d ke ye the majority speak Persian em now and

čiziam ke hast (.). mamulan pesarā then there’s this thing (.). usually the guys

(.). alân masan pesarāye hamdoreye man (.). nowadays like the guys in my generation

bale yes

tedāde pesarāyi ke gilaki harf mizanan the number of guys speaking Gilaki is

xeili bištart az tedāde doxtarāst (.). yani much higher than the girls (.). meaning

agaram harf nazanan even if they don’t speak it they know it

hatman baladan (.). ba:d hatmanam harf for sure (.). and they most definitely speak

mizanan va in barāšun (.). masan oftekelās it and for them (.). it doesn’t lower their

nadāre vali masan doxtarāye rašti (.). status but like the Rashti girls (.).

masan xode man bištart say mikonan or even me as well try to

fārsi harf bezanan (.). čon man raftam tu speak Persian (.). because I entered the

tāātre folklor kār kardam kam kam be theatre and worked in folklore I slowly

gilaki alāqemand šodam (.). va bāz barāye became fond of Gilaki (.). and still for me my

man masan kase ša:n ni-. (.). vali bāz bazi status won’t decre-. (.). but still in some

jāhā ehsās mikonam ke eh (.). åre maslan eh places I feel that uh (.). yes for example uh

bāyad masan farsi harf bezanam behtare I should speak Persian because it’s better

kodum jāhā: what places?
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29 L: ye jāyi ehsās mikoni masan bexātere
   in places where you feel that because of you

30 L: gilaki harfzadanet migan ke (.). eh
   speaking Gilaki they’ll say that (.). uh

31 L: kelāse kāret masan miyād pāyin
   the status of your performance will decrease

32 L: yā masan ye hālati čiz mikon-
   or for example in a way it wil-

33 P: masan bā ye tabageye qa- qešri yā
   is it like connected to a certain cl- class or

34 P: masan bā eh
   for example with uh

35 L: na qešre xāssi na asan momkene
   no it’s not a specific class it’s even possible

36 L: (.). taraf masalan (.). eh tabageye
   (.). for example someone (.). uh from the middle-

37 L: motevaset bāše (.). vali masan (.). albate
   class (.). but for example (.). even

38 L: alan injuri nistamā: vali xob em man em
   though I’m not like this but well em I em

39 L: farz kon (.). man rāhat nistam vaxti
   imagine (.). I don’t feel comfortable when

40 L: gilaki harf mizanam čon engad fārsi harf
   I speak Gilaki because I’ve spoken Persian so

41 L: zadam (.). vali bazi az bačehā na (.). bazi
   long (.). but some of the kids no (.). some

42 L: az bačehā masan gilaki harf mizanan (.). yā
   of the kids speak Gilaki (.). or

43 L: masan bā pedarmadareš gilaki harf miz- (.).
   for example speak Gilaki with their pare- (.)

44 L: alā- masan duste man ke male āstānast eh
   no- like my friend who’s from Astaneh uh

45 L: (.). masan bā bābā māmāneš gilaki harf
   (.). she speaks Gilaki to her parents

46 L: mizane vali bā mā fārsi harf mizane (.).
   but speaks Persian with us (.).
Prior to this example Lida has spoken about how many young Rashtis do not like to speak Rashti, one reason being that it is associated with low status. She is here asked who she believes speaks Persian and who speaks Rashti. Like in the example “We all understand Gilaki”, Lida is asked about Rashti, but in her answer she speaks about Gilaki. This could be an indicator that the boundaries between Gilaki and Rashti are not so strictly drawn.

Lida answers that the majority speak Persian, but then starts talking about the men in her generation (l. 12–13). According to Lida the number of young men speaking the Gilaki language is much higher (xeili bištar) (l. 16) than the young women, and that young men most definitely speak it (hatmanam harf mizanan) (l. 18–19). In cases where the young men do not speak the Gilaki language they certainly know it (l. 17–18). Thus the social category of gender is mentioned repeatedly throughout this example, as the participant speaks about those who speak Persian and Gilaki. The social category of age is also mentioned briefly in line 13 as Lida speaks about the young men of her generation compared to the young women of Rasht. However, the entire example concerns young men and women, so age plays a role throughout the example, even though it is only mentioned in
According to Lida young women are more likely to speak Persian in comparison to young men, more of whom speak Gilaki. The reason she gives is that it doesn’t lower their status (otekekaš nadāre) (l. 19–20) stressing the word lower as this is an important factor as to why the young men can speak the Gilaki language whereas the young women refrain from doing so. She then contrasts the young men with the young women as she says but like the Rašti girls (vali masan doxtarīye raštī) (l. 20). She does not finish her argument, but it is the word but (vali) that indicates the contrast with the Rashti girls. She brings herself into this as she says that even she tries to speak Persian.

Further down in this example (l. 25–27 and 29–32) she admits that she would feel uncomfortable if she were to speak Gilaki in places where it would result in a decrease in social status. She therefore prefers speaking Persian. By speaking about how Rashti girls and she herself prefer not to speak Gilaki, Lida illustrates the correlation she believes exists between low social status and speaking Gilaki. It should be highlighted that even though Lida shows in her speech that her behaviour is the same as the other Rashti young women she has discussed, that is, that they do not speak Gilaki, Lida nevertheless tries to contrast herself with these young women. She does this by expressing her interest in the Gilaki language, which she claims is a result of her involvement in theatre and folklore (l. 22–24). This is an indication of the ambivalence towards Gilaki mentioned previously. The participants do not speak Gilaki (or Rashti) and even make fun of it, and contrast themselves with those who speak it, and yet at times they express fond feelings towards Gilaki and Rashti. The stigmatisation of Gilaki is visible in this part as Lida expresses positive feelings towards Gilaki, and claims that she is fond of it because of her engagement in folklore and theatre. Even though she expresses these feelings, she adds that even for her it is easier to speak Persian in some places, since speaking Gilaki would lead to a decrease in the status of her performance.

Lida is asked whether speaking Gilaki is linked to any specific class (l. 33–34), but she answers that this is not the case and briefly mentions the middle-class (l. 36–37), and then returns to her claims that she does not feel comfortable speaking the Gilaki language as she has spoken Persian for so long, thus justifying why she never speaks Gilaki (l. 39–41).

Lida returns to the likelihood of young women speaking Gilaki being less in contrast with young men doing so in lines 47–50, by giving one of her female friends living in Astaneh as an example. Here, she explains that the friend in question does indeed speak Gilaki to her parents, but she ends by once again repeating that this is an exception: but it’s sort of their percentage is very low (.) so the percentage of the girls who speak Gilaki (.) is much lower than the guys who
speak Gilaki (vali čizi ke hast inā kheyli darsadešun kame (.) yani darsade dokhtarāyi ke gilaki harf mizanan (.) xeili kamtar az darsade pesarāyi ke gilaki harf mizanan) (l. 47–50), as if to back up her previous statement about the young men speaking Gilaki to a higher degree than young women.

In the final lines of this sequence, gender is invoked once more when Lida uses her uncle and active voicing to illustrate the difference between young men and women and how they speak. Whereas young women are described as cleaning up the way they speak, which is explained as pure Persian, one can hear from afar whether a young man is a Gilak or not depending on his accent. While previously in the example Lida discusses those who speak Persian and those who speak Gilaki, here it has changed to concern speaking with or without an accent. Persian, the language the young women speak, is discussed in terms of clean (šosterofte) (l. 55) and pure (tamiz) (l. 56). Conversely, speaking Persian with a Gilaki accent must then be seen as the opposite of clean and pure. Like example 3 “We all understand Gilaki”, this also shows that not only is the social norm pushing young women to speak accent-free Persian, there are also characteristics that are linked to each language. Not only is Persian connected to femininity, it is also described with words such as pure and clean. Gilaki, on the other hand, is perceived as male, loud and distinct as it can be heard from far away. Gilaki and Persian are contrasted with each other, both in regard to gender but also how they are described, and where Persian comes out as the better and superior language.

The gender aspect and how women are more sensitive to prestige and status (see e.g. Trudgill 1979) is illustrated in two parts of this example, first in lines 10–27, and then in lines 44–56. In lines 10–27 it can be seen as Lida speaks about how there are more young men in her generation than young women who speak Gilaki. The reason for this is that young women perceive speaking Gilaki as something that will lower their status. Lida, as a young woman, includes herself in this group and admits that there are places where she is keen on speaking Persian. In lines 44–46, Lida speaks about a female friend who speaks Gilaki with her parents. This could be seen as stating that young women also speak Gilaki, but this statement is followed by Lida stating that there are very few girls who speak Gilaki in comparison to the young men. In order to further strengthen her claim, she uses active voicing and gives her uncle’s utterance about the pronunciation of young Rashti men as an example.

The next example follows directly after this discussion, and concerns an episode in a class Lida’s sister attended, where a young man would speak Persian with an accent and the reaction of a young woman in that class.
Example 9. The classmate had an accent
The people participating in this example are Lida (L) and the researcher (P), and the conversation takes place at Lida’s home. In this example Lida continues her discussions regarding Gilaki from the previous example. Here Lida gives an example of how a person can be treated when speaking with an accent.

1 L: man hattā yādame (.) ye kelās dāšt xāharam
   I even remember (.) there was a class my sister

2 L: ye kelās bud (.) bad ye āqāyi unjā
   was in a class (.) and there was a man there

3 L: masalan (.) fārsi harf mizad vali bā
   for example (.) he’d speak Persian but with

4 L: lahjeye masan gilaki bad mixāst
   like a Gilaki accent and for example when he

5 L: bege masan havā saboke: (.) migoft ke havā
   said the weather is nice (.) he would say the

6 L: subuke (.) injuri harf mizad bad un masan
   weather is nice (.) he’d speak like that and

7 L: yeki az hamkelāsīhāš bāhāŝ šuxi mikard
   then like one of his classmates would tease

8 L: (.) havā čiye: rāstí āqā soma či
   what’s the weather like sir what did you

9 L: gofti:n (.) masan ye jāhāyi barāš jāle:b
   you say (.) for example sometimes it was

10 L: bud (.) masan šayad hālā dast andāxte bud
    interesting for her (.) for example maybe she

11 L: na az lahāze manfi (.) vali masan barāš
    would tease not in a negative way (.) but it

12 L: jāleb bud (.) gāhi vaqtā inā (.)
    was interesting for her (.) sometimes these (.)

13 L: masan ye lahjeye širini dāre:
    for example someone might have a sweet accent

14 L: gāhi vaqtā migim vá: masan čegad lahje
    sometimes we say ooh what an accent he/she

15 L: dāre: (.) āxe čerā injuri harf mizane: (.)
    has (.) why does he/she speak like that (.)

16 L: mitune barāye baziā yā maslan un doxtar
    for some it can or for example that girl well
17 L: dige xob xeili hassāsiyat dāš vali (.)
    she was very sensitive but (.)

18 L: mamulan barāye kāsi ke masxarašun
    usually in order so that people won’t make fun

19 L: nakone: doxtarā (.) yā migam barāye un
    of them the girls (.) or I think that

20 L: masalan eh ĵeste doxtarāne masan
    for example uh girlish gesture or for example

21 L: un doxtarānegi (.) masan mixād ke eh
    that girlish way (.) she sort of wants to uh

22 L: hamiše doxtarā say mikonan (.) masan
    girls always try to (.) for example

23 L: tamiztar bāšan ya masan (.) ye seri čizāro
    be purer or for example (.) they follow some

24 L: rāāyat mikonan masan farz kon sibilešo
    rules for example imagine she’ll remove her

25 L: masan mizane: dāre mire birun (.)
    moustache like when she goes out (.) for

26 L: masan xeili barāš moheme
    example it’s very important for her

27 L: maslan mige āre fārsiram čiz harf
    for example she says yes I should speak Persian

28 L: bezanam (.) barāye xode manam moheme
    like you know (.) it’s important for me as well

29 L: (.) masalan (.) delam mixād e- masan
    (.) for example (.) I want to e- for example

30 L: gilaki harf mizanam (.) čiz
    I speak Gilaki (.) like

31 L: gilaki harf bezanam fārsiram masan
    I should speak Gilaki and for example

32 L: xeili xub harf bezanam (.) yani
    speak Persian very well as well (.) meaning

33 L: kāmelan har doro az ham tafkik konam
    keep the two completely separated

This example shows the reactions an accent evokes in a young woman, but no-where in this example does Lida say that the young man was made fun of by his
male classmates. In fact she also points out that young women are more sensitive towards accents.

Here Lida introduces how the young man in question would speak with an accent, and in order to show how it would sound, she uses both active voicing and code-switching in lines 5–6, quoting the young man as he would speak about the weather, *the weather is nice* (*havā subuke*). She does this in order to illustrate his accent, but she also uses active voicing in lines 8–9, in order to illustrate how the female classmate would react to his way of speaking, by saying *what's the weather like sir what did you say* (*havā čiye: rāsti āqā šomā či gofti:n*). According to Lida the way the young man spoke was interesting for the young woman in question, which she mentions twice in lines 10 and 12. She also explains that the young women would tease the young man, but *not in a negative way* (*na az lahāze manfi*) (l. 11), i.e. with no bad intentions.

In previous examples the participants have stated that it is more common for young men to speak with an accent in contrast to women who are more likely to speak accent-free Persian, as speaking with an accent has no consequences for young men. Interestingly, it is a young man who is being made fun of here when speaking with an accent, which goes against the claims that speaking with an accent has no consequences for young men. In lines 12–15 Lida also explains that an accent can be looked upon in different ways; at times people can think a person’s accent is sweet and interesting, while at other moments they find an accent exaggerated and bad, even though the difference between the situations is not explained. That an accent is at times perceived as exaggerated and bad can be difficult to see in the English translation, but in Persian *čeqad lahje dāre* (*what an accent he/she has*) (l. 14–15) and *āxe čerā injuri harf mizane:* (*why do he/she speak like that*) (l. 15) both have negative meanings. The first can be roughly translated as someone who has a strong accent, which can be easily detected, while the second throws the accent into question.

By using the exemplification of the two class-mates, Lida also invokes the social category of gender, and how young women are more sensitive towards the less prestigious Gilaki accent. It is true that it was a man who was made fun of because of his accent, but keep in mind that it was not another man who made fun of him, but a woman class-mate. Lida, herself explains this in the following lines when she claims that the female class-mate was very sensitive towards someone speaking with an accent. This shows that it is women who find speaking with an accent amusing and something one can make fun of, even if the person speaking with an accent is a man. Nowhere in this example does Lida say that any of the male classmates reacted to the accent and made fun of the young man. A similar
situation was exemplified in example “The man at the exhibition” where Mrs Saberi witnessed an esteemed photographer speak with an accent and in her opinion lost this status. Mrs Saberi did not speak about any of the men present at the exhibition showing a negative reaction towards the photographer’s accent.

In line 18 there is a slight change in perspective, as Lida tries to explain the standpoint of young women as regards the way they speak. She starts by saying that young women do not want people to make fun of them (l. 18–19). It seems that on every occasion someone speaks with an accent, it is in fact the cause of teasing. Lida continues by saying that a young woman has a girlish gesture and girlish way (jeste doxtarāne and doxtarānegi) (l. 20–21). According to Lida, a young woman is also keen on being purer and following certain rules, such as removing facial hair before going out. All of these are characteristics and behaviours linked to femininity, and as femininity is also linked to speaking well, it results in young women making an attempt to speak Persian without any traces of Gilaki, because as has been shown the Gilaki language is linked to masculinity.

In lines 27–28 Lida uses active voicing to demonstrate how a young woman should think when it comes to how to speak, yes I should speak Persian like you know (āre fārsiram čiz harf bezanam). Lida does not explicitly say that a young woman believes she should speak accent-free; instead she used the word čiz, which is here translated to like you know.

The monolingual norm becomes visible in this statement as Lida concludes by saying that she herself is like this as well, that it is important for her to speak very well (xeili xub) (l. 32), that is keep the Persian and Gilaki languages completely separated (l. 33). In the previous example Lida stated that she herself has become fond of Gilaki ever since she entered the theatre, showing that she is not completely opposed to the Gilaki language. However, here she states that she finds it important to keep the two languages (Persian and Gilaki) separate. This supports Jørgensen’s (2005: 393–394) claim that even in situations when bilingualism is favoured, people consider it important to “clean up” one’s language, so that each language can be kept apart and pure. This highlights what has been mentioned in several of the examples, which is that it seems clear that speaking Persian with a Rashti or Gilaki accent is stigmatised among women and in some contexts (e.g. public ones).

5.5. Concluding discussion
The main focus of this chapter has been to see the participants’ stand on Gilaki and Rashti. The chapter has been divided into two major sections, the first dealing
with how the participants describe and evaluate the Gilaki language and the Rasht

dialect, and the second has been the correlation between language and gender.

Through the examples, it has been shown that the participants’ identities in re-

tion to speaking Rashti is constructed at the intersection of the social catego-
ies of gender, class, status, and age. These social categories are combined in dif-
erent formations as the participants discuss those who speak Gilaki/Rashti or Per-

sian with an accent, and contrast them with those who speak accent-free Persian.

For example, gender, status and class are combined in example 7. “The upper-

class guys can speak Gilaki”, where Roya describes Gilaki speakers and those

who speak with a Gilaki accent as male, people belonging to the lower classes,

and having low status. In other examples, other combinations of the above-men-

tioned social categories are seen as linked to how different groups of society

speak.

When speaking to the participants about Rashti and Gilaki, all of them stressed

the importance of keeping these two completely separate from Persian, and how

bad it sounded if someone speaks Persian with a Gilaki or Rashti accent. For the

participants it was more important to speak Persian without a Gilaki or Rashti

accent, even in cases where they expressed positive opinions towards Gilaki or

Rasht. In example 1. “The loose Rashti dialect”, speaking with an accent was

described as shameful, and in example 9., “The classmate had an accent”, the par-

ticipant explained that it is preferable to keep them separated. Not being able to

keep them separated is constructed as a sign of not being able to speak “proper”

Persian, which is highly frowned upon. Their opinions about keeping Persian sepa-

rated from Gilaki/Rashti invoke what Jørgensen and Holmen (1997) and Jørgen-

sen (2005) have written in regard to bilingualism and the monolingual norm, and

have shown that people have similar attitudes in regard to mixing two languages.

Those who are in favour of the monolingual norm believe it to be better to make

sure that bilingual people do not let the two languages affect one another, and that

they speak purely, do not mix languages, and clean up their speech.

When discussing how some people speak with an accent, the participants

would sometimes make a differentiation between lahjeye rašti dāštan, meaning

speaking Persian with a Rashti accent, and bā lahjeye rašti harf zadan, which

means speaking Rashti. When speaking about Rashti, the participants show am-

bivalent tendencies in their definition and usage of the term. At times the Rashti

dialect is used as a synonym of Gilaki, while at other times the participants keep

them apart and speak about both the Gilaki language and Rashti. Gilaki is referred

to as both a language and a dialect, but Rashti is referred to only as a dialect. It

can therefore also be hard to see a distinction between a Gilaki and a Rashti accent

in Persian. Many times no label is actually given when discussing Gilaki and
Rashti, meaning that they do not say zabāne gilaki, lahjeye gilaki, or lahjeye raštī, but only gilaki or raštī.

When discussing why speaking Rashti, Gilaki, or speaking Persian with an accent is perceived as demeaning and negative, the participants draw correlations between language, prestige, and status. The participants describe Rashti and Gilaki as funny, or ridiculous, or status lowering. Furthermore, Gilaki and Rashti are described as traditional, unsophisticated, and rural, which would suggest that Persian is the language of modernity, sophistication, and an urban lifestyle. In many places the participants claim that they themselves only use Gilaki or Rashti to make fun or joke around, and they laugh and giggle even when discussing the subject as if even the thought is amusing. The situation in Gilan is very similar to the one in Oberwart (Austria) which was studied by Gal (1979). In both societies there are connections made between where one lives, what social class one belongs to, and what variety one speaks. In this study, the connection with class is an emic one, and based on the views and claims of the participants. Gilaki is by many connected to a rural lifestyle which today has almost no prestige. Peasants are considered to be of a low class with a poor education, no sophistication and representatives of a retrogressive community. But the urban life connected to Persian represents the sophistication of a modern and developing society, with more benefits as well as higher class and prestige.

According to Kuusela (1980: 11–12) when people wish to belong to the majority group and distance themselves from their own group, they tend to give up and even attack the symbols of the group they belong to. When language is an important symbol for the group, individuals will express negative feelings towards their mother tongue. Nordberg (1994: 135) has similar arguments when he states that social identities are seen as part of people’s linguistic behaviour, and people use language varieties to show loyalty to a certain group. This can clearly be seen here, on those occasions when the participants distance themselves from the Rashti people, and express negative opinions about speaking Gilaki/Rashti or Persian with an accent.

Expressing negative opinions towards speaking Gilaki/Rashti or with an accent, does not, however, mean that the participants have only negative feelings towards and opinions of Gilaki and Rashti. Rather their opinions and feelings are quite contradictory and paradoxical. There are occasions when support is expressed for Gilaki and Rashti, saying things like “it is part of our town, a part of our province”, or “sadly this Rashti dialect was ridiculed during the Shah era”, that Rashti reminds them of old times, or is a symbol of their province and roots. Nevertheless, even on these occasions the participants conclude by saying that they themselves would not willingly speak Rashti, and that they make sure they
speak Persian without any trace of a Rashti or Gilaki accent. This indicates the participants’ ambivalent feelings towards Rashti and Gilaki. On the one hand, they are unwilling to speak Rashti or Gilaki as they link them to low status, the inability to speak proper Persian, or not being cute and feminine. On the other hand, Rashti and Gilaki invoke fond memories of the past, or are perceived as symbols of the participants’ roots, city and province.

When it comes to the gender issue, especially younger generation women are according to the participants less likely to speak Gilaki and Rashti or with an accent due to social norms. Since these young women portray themselves as more sensitive towards what others think of them, they turn to Persian as a means of communication. Several of the participants claim that since women are also more sensitive towards their status and level of sophistication, they are keen to speak Persian without any trace of a Gilaki/Rashti accent. In cases where young women are said to speak Gilaki/Rashti or with an accent, the participants state that this only concerns very few young women, and when it happens it is explained as these young women either belonging to more traditional families who live in the lower parts of the city, or being rural. These findings mirror Trudgill’s (1974) study of Norwich, where he came to the conclusion that one can find differences between male and female speech habits. Whereas women prefer overt norms associated with refined qualities, the cosmopolitan marketplace and its standard language, men are more positive towards covert, vernacular prestige norms that are perceived as rough and tough.

According to several of the participants, even middle and upper-class young men use Rashti in their communication with their peers without it causing any embarrassment to them or lowering their status or level of sophistication (example 7, 8,). One of the participants explains this by claiming that young men are free to speak it among themselves and they have “these mafia groups among themselves” and “even when they fight” they use curses in Gilaki. It is constructed as natural for young men to use Rashti in their everyday lives and with their friends, but young women “don’t have these kinds of groupings” (example 7), which prevents them from using Rashti. Regarding the correlation between gender and language, there is no strong consensus, and at times there are tensions and differences between the examples in this chapter. Many of the participants express the opinion that it is worse for women than for men to speak with an accent, but it has been shown in two of the examples that men risk being the target of mockery and ridicule as well. This can be seen in the examples 3. “The man at the exhibition” and 9. “The weather is nice”. In the first, according to the participants, a highly esteemed photographer lost his high position and status when he spoke Persian with an accent. In the second a young man was made fun of by his female class-mate
when he spoke with an accent. It should, nevertheless, be pointed out that in both cases it was the opinion of women who heard and commented on the accent. In neither case, did the participants say anything about the men present in these situations reacting negatively towards a man speaking with an accent.

As has been mentioned above, the participants’ opinions of Gilaki and Rashti are not completely clear-cut and unproblematic. Rather, they show great ambivalence towards speaking these two varieties, how they define Gilaki and Rashti, and in their identities as Rashtis when the matter of speaking Gilaki and Rashti is discussed. Even though in many places they express negative feelings towards these two varieties, or speaking Persian with an accent, the following chapters will show how the participants evaluate their city and province in positive terms.
6. The Rashti identity in relation to geography and region

6.1. Introduction

This chapter concerns geography and collective memory and how they are used by the participants in the staged group discussions in constructing a Rashti identity. Geography is not in itself a social category, so the focus in this chapter is partly on possible social categories the participants link to being Gilaki or Rashti versus coming from other parts of Iran, and partly on how the participants create their Rashti identity using various discursive means, such as word contrasting, categorisation, extreme-case formulations, category-bound activities and attributes, and active voicing.

Geography is important in the analysis of this study as it becomes relevant in the construction of the participants’ identity as Gilaks and Rashtis. However, defining and delimiting geographical uniqueness is a highly complex venture, which needs to be systematically unpacked. When speaking about being a Rashti and what it means to be a Rashti, it becomes clear that it is not only constituted by being born and raised in Rasht, or having Rashti parent(s). According to the participants, being a Rashti is more than just a connection to a certain geographical area. There are several factors, historical and contemporary, that separate the people of Rasht from other Iranians. Being Rashti thus concerns a set of features associated specifically and solely with being a person from Rasht, thus setting him or her apart from people from other parts of Iran. It is this set of features that is partly the focus of this study, to discover what characteristics and features the participants bring up when they construe a Rashti identity.

As has been stated above, when the participants speak about being Rashti they refer to a person born or with their roots in Rasht. Rashti is at times used by the participants as synonym to being a Gilak, yet at other times the participants regard the people living in East-Gilan as Rashti and contrast them with those living in West-Gilan (the Talesh). Still at other times the participants include the villagers living in the countryside surrounding Rasht in the term Rashti, and describe them as having the same characteristics as people from Rasht. This happens when the participants speak about the open-mindedness and modernity of the people of
Rasht. The villagers are then associated with Rashtis and contrasted with villagers living in other parts of Iran.

This chapter continues with a section, 6.2., that concerns place identity and collective memory, as many of the arguments and explanations the participants give in regard to a unique Gilaki/Rashti identity can be closely linked to theories concerning place identity and collective memory.

Two sections then follow, each dealing with a specific aspect of geography and collective memory, and its role in the co-construction of the Rashti identity among the participants. The first aspect, presented in 6.3., concerns the participants’ argument regarding the Alborz Mountain Range and the protection and isolation it provides for the province of Gilan. This aspect concerns isolation and protection from land-based invasions and attacks from the south. Here, protection and isolation are described as positive and prerequisites for having developed regional uniqueness.

The second aspect, presented in 6.4., regards the Caspian Sea and the harbour of Anzali, and their role as the gateway to Europe and Russia. The Caspian Sea and the harbour have, according to the participants, ensured communication and interaction with Europe and Russia. This aspect focuses on northern foreign influences, which have been made possible through the Caspian Sea. The chapter is summed up with concluding discussions in 6.5.

6.2. Collective memory and place

As the identity of the participants in this study is closely linked to the geographical areas of Rasht and Gilan Province, it is necessary to speak about and clarify the terms place attachment, place identity, and collective memory.

The term collective memory can be traceable to Émile Durkheim, who wrote about commemorative rituals in his book The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life ([1912] 1995). The work on collective memory was carried out by Durkheim’s student Halbwachs who was the one that introduced the term collective memory, and who believed memory to be about how minds work together in society, and how they are structured by social arrangements. According to Halbwachs, group members provide memories and press individuals into remembering certain events while forgetting others. This means that some memories have been provided for group members and have not been experienced first-hand (Halbwachs 1992: 38–40, 49–51).

According to Le Goff (1992: 143), collective memory both determines and is determined by the society in question, and is most often used by social classes in
order to gain power. Collective memory is also a mechanism used for transferring knowledge and cultural capital from one generation to the next.

Collective memory is linked to place, which makes the theories of place attachment and place identity relevant here. Durkheim ([1912] 1995) argues that when individuals identify themselves with a place it involves a process of social labelling and identification, and people identify themselves and others as belonging to countries, cities, towns, and villages. When meeting strangers, people start an initial interaction process of cognitive mapping, where they try to gather information in order to categorise the stranger in order to make him or her less strange. Signs such as skin colour, accent, and expressions are looked for. We then try to figure out things such as where a person is from, as place is seen as a significant indicator of culture, class, nationality, urbanity etcetera. Apart from being a social label and cultural indicator, place also includes a notion of bonding and belonging (Inglis 2009: 3–4). In his paper ‘Local belonging, identities and sense of place in contemporary Ireland’, Inglis argues that identifying with a place requires some sort of categorisation, and a notion of outsiders and insiders. So when people identify themselves with a place, they believe they possess certain social traits (Inglis 2009: 2).

There are several links between place and place attachment, such as how long one has lived in a certain place, the social ties one has to a place, as well as physical features and symbolic meanings (Stedman 2003). People who have a strong sense of attachment to a place also tend to be more interested in the place’s past as well as their own roots, in comparison to people with weaker emotional bonds (Lewicka 2005, Lewicka 2008: 211–212). Among the scholars who have written about place attachment, Low and Altman (1992) are those most often cited. According to them, place attachment is the link between a positive bond to a spatial setting and a person and/or group.

Place identity is yet another way of viewing people’s bonds with specific places. Place identity can be interpreted in two different ways. In the first, identity can refer to a place and concern the distinct features which make it unique. In the second meaning of the term, place identity concerns the features of a person, and not the place. According to Proshansky (1978) and Proshansky et al. (1983), place identity is presented as a sub-structure of the psychological theory of self-identity, where the focus lies on the individual as a member of a social world. Self-identity regards the ways an individual reflects on himself. This reflection is achieved when the individual takes into consideration how he is perceived by his social surroundings (Jaspers 2012: 25). Proshansky defines place identity as the dimensions of self that define an individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical
environment. This is done through a complex pattern of conscious and uncon-
scious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, behavioural tendencies
and skills relevant to the individual’s environment (Proshansky 1978: 155).

What is relevant to this study, which can be shown in the following examples,
is how social ties link the participants to a certain place, in this case Gilan and Rasht depending partly on what they are questioned about. The participants also
speak about place identity when they describe themselves and people from other
cities and provinces as possessing certain characteristics and features, which they
link to that specific place. It should, however, be kept in mind that it is not only
being born and raised in the city of Rasht or the province of Gilan that has shaped
the identity of the participants of this study. An individual’s identity is considered
as flexible, context based, and created through social interaction. As this study is
based on an intersectional perspective, various social categories are seen to be
combined to shape a person’s identity. A particular category becomes apparent in
the participants’ discussions when they are specifically asked about it; for exam-
ple when the participants are asked about the differences between Rasht/Gilan and
other cities/provinces.

6.3. The protecting mountains

In this section, the place of Gilan Province becomes apparent as the participant
Roya speaks about the Alborz Mountain Range and its role as isolating and pro-
tecting Gilan and the Gilaks from the rest of Iran and other foreign influence.
Other participants speak about how the Alborz Mountains have protected Gilan from unwanted invasions, and they specifically mention the Arabs. Apart from
this example, statements concerning Arabs have also occurred in the natural con-
versations. As mentioned in chapter 3., the natural conversations are useful in re-
gard to understanding the field, and are used when relevant in the analysis of the
staged conversations.

Example 10. The Alborz Mountain Range providing protection

In this example Roya discusses the geography of the province of Gilan, when she
points out contrasts between people from Gilan and the rest of the Iranian popu-
lation. The participants in this example are Roya (R) and the researcher (P). Prior
to this conversation, Roya has talked about the women of Gilan, and how life in
the province is easier for them compared to women in the rest of the country. She
has described differences in lifestyle for women in different Iranian cities and has
compared them to Rasht. Here, she is asked why she thinks life in Gilan and Rasht
is easier for women and girls compared to other cities.
1 P: va fek mikoni ke barāye čiye ke tuye rašt
   and why do you think it’s easier in Rasht

2 P: yā tu gilān rāhatare:
   or in Gilan?

3 R: man fek mikonam bāzam bexātere eh
   I think it’s because uh

4 R: tabiastešune yani šomā mas- šomā tasavor
   of their natural environment well consider for

5 R: konin injā mantaqeyi bude ke
   you consider the fact that this

6 R: hamīše kenāre sāhel bude: (.)
   has always been a region close to the sea (.)

7 R: mosalaman (.). šomā pušeše
   obviously (.). if you look at the clothing of

8 R: zanhāye gilāniro negā konid pušeše xeili
   Gilaki women their clothing is much

9 R: azādtari dāran (.). pušešešun bištar
   freer (.). their clothing has always had more of

10 R: hālate tazini dāste barāšun hamīše ta
   a decorative purpose for them compared to

11 R: masan zanhāyi ke tu kuhestān budan tu
   for example for women who were in mountains

12 R: manāteqe kaviri zendegi mikardan (.)
   who lived in desert areas (.)

13 R: bad (.). injā bexātere (.). dorānāye
   then (.). here because of (.). its historical

14 R: tārixiyi ke dāste: aksaran bexātere
   eras most of the time because of

15 R: (.). reštekuhe alborz hamīše
   (.). the Alborz Mountain Range it has always

16 R: az hojum o hamle dar amān bude: (.)
   been spared from invasions and attacks (.)

17 R: masalan tuye hamleye arabhā injā dar amān
   it was for example spared from the Arab

18 R: bude (.). aksaran gilān kešide
   invasion (.). most of the time Gilan would not
19 R: nemišod tu janghā in tasiire
   be dragged into the wars the influence of

20 R: aqvāme dige ruye gilān namunde (.) aksar-
   other people hasn’t stayed in Gilan (.) mostl-

21 R: hamīše hākeme jodāye xodešo dāšte yani dā
   it has always had its own separate rulers in

22 R: haqīqat farhangeše xeili bā
   fact its culture differs greatly from the

23 R: farhange (.) mardome baqiyyeye
   culture (.) of people in other

24 R: noqāte irān tafāvot dāre
   places of Iran

In this example, geography is highlighted in lines 4–6 when Roya speaks about their natural environment (tablātesune) (l. 4), and the closeness to the sea. It is interesting that she refers to the environment as their[s], but looking at the immediate passage above, Roya has discussed virginity and how some tribes still take their girls to doctors to make sure that the girls are still virgins when they are being married off. It could be that since she has discussed a taboo subject, e.g. sexuality and virginity, her speech is still adjusted in a way where she is distancing herself from it all.

Here, Roya starts by describing the environment, but soon changes topic and moves on to the social category of gender by speaking about women and women’s clothing in line 7 by using the discursive marker obviously (mosalaman). When asked about why it is easier to live in Rasht and Gilan, it is the clothing of the women that Roya discusses, even though the questions asked did not actually mention anything regarding women. However, as she knew that the study concerned Rashtī and Gilaki women, it is not strange that she discusses subjects that concern girls and women in particular. By starting her statement concerning the clothing of women with obviously, Roya indicates assertiveness, which functions as a hinder for being argued against or questioned. According to Roya the women of Gilan have always (hamiše) worn clothes that have a decorative purpose (l. 9–10). The clothes of Gilaki women are described in a positive manner, such as being much freer (xeili āzādtar) (l. 8–9), and having a decorative purpose (hālate tazini) (l. 10). In Iran, women’s clothing has long been a matter of politics and the hijab has been compulsory for about three decades, but by describing the clothing of the Gilaki women as freer and decorative she describes Gilaki women as unique, especially as she claims that it has always been the case. As in the following chapter, it is not women who are contrasted with men, when the participants
discuss the social category of gender in relation to the Gilaki and Rashti identity, rather it is the women of their region who are contrasted with women living in other parts of Iran.

Roya uses an extreme case formulation (*always*) when speaking about the decorative clothing of the Gilaki women. These kinds of formulations maximize a description in order to strengthen a statement and show that what has been said is true. Gilaki women’s identity is constituted here as women who use clothing for decorative purposes, rather than for example covering purposes. Roya does not explicitly speak about the covering purposes of clothing, but considering the Iranian dress codes, clothing has long had mainly a covering purpose. The way Roya speaks about the clothing of Gilaki women, also highlights certain category-bound attributes, in this case freer and decorative clothing. She also contrasts the category of Gilaki women (and their clothing) with the category of women who were in mountains who lived in desert areas (*zanhāyi ke tu kuhestān budan tu manāteqe kaviri zendegi mikardan*) (l. 11–12), even though she does not specifically describe the clothing of the women in this second category. The issue of place identity also becomes evident here, in regard to the second meaning of the term, i.e. that it concerns the features of a person living or originating from a certain place. It becomes evident as Roya claims that women in Gilan dress in a certain way, and that their clothing has a certain function that the clothing of women in other places does not have.

It should be noted that when speaking about the Gilaki women and their clothing, Roya uses the words *their* and *them* (l. 9 and 10). This might be interpreted as her distancing herself from the women of Gilan and their freer way of dressing, but looking at other examples (examples 11 and 13), it becomes clear that other participants use third person plural pronouns to speak about the Gilaki and Rashti people when discussing historical events. That she is speaking about the past here can be detected through the fact that she is using past tense of verbs *dāste* (*had*), *budan* (*were*), and *zendegi mikardan* (*lived*) (l. 10–12). Nowadays the national dress regulations in Iran are the same regardless of the region women live in, but here Roya is speaking about how women in the past used to dress in their traditional clothing. It should therefore not be seen as a way of the participant contrasting herself with the rest of the Gilaki and Rashti people by using the pronouns *their* and *them*.

From line 13 there is a topic shift as Roya starts talking about *historical eras* (*dorānāye tārixi*), but what she discusses also concerns the geography of Gilan. As when she discussed the clothing of Gilaki women using different discursive means when arguing her case, Roya uses various means when discussing the historical causes for why it is easier to live in Rasht and Gilan. In lines 14–18 she
speaks about geography in terms of the isolation and protection the Alborz Mountain Range has provided historically. Isolation, which could otherwise be seen as something negative, is described here in positive terms, and claimed by the participant to have enabled the Gilaki people to stay out of the influence of other people (l. 15–20). Roya uses words with negative connotations: *invasions, attacks* and *wars* (*hamle, hojum* and *jang*) (l. 16–19), when speaking about the isolation of Gilan Province. Invasions, attacks and wars are category-bound activities linked to non-Gilik, and which Gilan has been spared from thanks to the isolation provided by the mountains. This is a strategy to distance Gilan and its people from negative category-bound activities and attributes, which would have entered the province had the mountains not been in the way.

Notice that at first Roya speaks about undefined attacks when she says *always* (*hamiše*), but she continues by exemplifying this in lines 17–18 when she gives the invasion of the Arabs as an example of an event Gilan has been spared from. By using exemplification when arguing her case, Roya further strengthens her claim of how Gilan has been spared from invasions. By stating that Gilan was spared from the Arab invasion in contrast to the rest of Iran, Roya distinguishes the province of Gilan from the rest of the country. Other participants express similar opinions in regard to how the Gilaks resisted the Arab invasion in the province, or by speaking in derogatory terms when it comes to Arabs, Arab culture, and Arabic. In one of the natural conversations a young man stated that the Arabs didn’t come to Gilan until at least three hundred years later than to the rest of Iran, and that the people of Gilan have never been true Muslims as they were never really conquered by the Arabs. Comments like these have been recurrent when I have spent time with the participants, and show that there is a mentality among the participants whereby they perceive the Gilaks or the Rashti people as little influenced by the Arabs, Islam, and other Iranians.

One more subject Roya brings up when speaking about the isolation provided by the Alborz Mountain Range is that according to her the Gilaks have always had their own separate rulers (l. 20–21). Using yet another extreme-case formulation *always* (*hamiše*) (l. 20) emphasises her point that the geography of the region has enabled a separation from the rest of the country. Having their own rulers has according to Roya been yet another way of ensuring that the culture of the Gilaks is different from other places in the country.

Roya concludes her discussion by speaking about how the culture of Gilan differs from the *culture* (*farhang*) of people in other places of Iran (*farhang* (*mardome baqiyeye noqāte irān*)) (l. 22–24). This is a recurrent pattern that can be seen in all the examples of this chapter, as the participants contrast themselves with the rest of the country by speaking about the *culture* (*farhang*) of Gilan/the
North/Anzali/Rasht contrasted with the culture of other places in Iran. She does not specify how the cultures differ, or whether one is better than the other, but looking at the whole example it can be shown that she speaks about life in Gilan in positive terms, e.g. freer and a more decorative clothing, and with a more peaceful history as the province has been able to avoid invasions, attacks, and wars.

In conclusion, when Roya speaks about the uniqueness of Gilan, she speaks about two aspects of the social category of geography. First, she contrasts the sea with the mountain and desert areas, and in the next sequence she speaks about the Alborz Mountain Range. The presence of the mountains has had two implications. First, it has ensured isolation from unwanted influence, and second it has provided protection against invading forces. Both of these aspects, in cooperation with the Caspian Sea, have, according to Roya, ensured the unique position of Gilan.

6.4. The Caspian Sea and the gateway to Europe

Whereas the Alborz Mountain Range, in the previous section, ensured a unique Gilaki identity provided through protection and isolation, the Caspian Sea and the harbour of Anzali have contributed to the uniqueness of the Gilaki and Rashti identity by facilitating communication and exchanges with Europe and Russia. In the following example, the participant discusses the influence she believes the closeness to the sea has had on the culture of the people of the region.

Example 11. The Mediterranean lifestyle

The participants in this discussion are Roya (R) and the researcher (P). In this example Roya is asked in what ways she thinks Rasht differs and what cities are better for young people to live in. Prior to this example she has said that life in Iran is generally rather restricted for young people, but that Rasht is different and better than the rest of the country. It is interesting that although she is asked about life in Rasht, she answers the question by discussing the culture and lifestyle of the people of Gilan compared to the rest of Iran.

1 P: va be nazare šomā rašt bā šahrāye dige
   and how do you think Rasht is different from

2 P: četori farq mikone: em hamin ke (. ) masan
   other cities? em the fact that (. ) for example

3 P: kodum šahrā behtaran ke adām hamin barāye
   what cities are better for people for this

4 P: (. ) zendegi barāye javunā:
   (. ) for living for young people?
R: 
man (.).

az nazare eh (.).

emkānāt xob

I (.).

regarding uh (.).

opportunities well

R: 
mosalaman tehrān (.).

vali eh be qeyr az

course Tehran (.).

but uh apart from

tehrān man xodam be

šaxsan az nazare

Tehran I myself personally

R: 
farhangi nemītunam hič šahre digeyi tu

cannot live in any other city

R: 
irān zendegi konam čonke bexātere

in Iran when it comes to the matter of culture

R: 
meditarāne budane injā (.).

un hālate

because it is so Mediterranean here (.).

the open

R: 
jolgei sāhelnešini farhang e mardome

plains life by the sea the culture of people

R: 
gilān zamin tā āsemūn bā farhang e

in Gilan differs tremendously from the culture

R: 
baqīye ostānā farq mikone (.).

eh of other provinces (.).

uh

R: 
mardome (.).

gilān hattā šoma age eh

the people (.).

of Gilan even if you uh

R: 
musiqišuno guš bokonin mus eqišun zamin

listen to their music their music differs

R: 
tā āsemūn bā baqīye e museqihā farq

tremendously with from other the music

R: 
mikone tarānehāšun eh asātirešun (.).

their ballads uh their myths (.)

R: 
masalan šomā vaqtī mirīn tuye manāteqa

for example when you go to mountain

R: 
kuhestāni dāstāni ke mādarbozorgā vāse

areas usually the stories the grandmothers

R: 
bačehāšun tarīf mikonan aksaran

tell their children are mostly

R: 
dāstānaye pahlavāni dāstānāye marbut be

about heroes or stories related to

R: 
jangāe valī injā maslan aksaran

wars but here the stories are mostly
Roya starts by contrasting Rasht (and Tehran) with other Iranian cities as she states that she cannot imagine living in any other city than Rasht or Tehran. As shown in the previous example, culture (farhang) is a very important factor, setting the Gilaks and Rashtis apart from others, and here Roya gives cultural differences as the reason why life in other cities and provinces is not an option for her.

It is interesting that when describing Tehran as a place where she could possibly live, she speaks about opportunities, but when contrasting Rasht and Gilan with other places in Iran, it is culture that becomes the prominent factor. When it comes to the link between the sea and the culture of Rasht, Roya discusses this topic in lines 9–11. She also makes associations to the Mediterranean, because it is so Mediterranean here (bexātere meditarāne budane injā) (l. 10), even though it does not border Iran in any way. In other examples, the participants speak about Rashti and Gilaki culture, and how they believe it to have been influenced by Russians, Europeans and other people who gained access to Gilan through the Caspian Sea. Roya, however, does not mention any other people and their influence on the culture of Rasht, but it is nevertheless interesting that she brings up the Mediterranean, albeit briefly and in passing.

In lines 11–28 Roya once more discusses the culture of the people of Gilan and the culture other provinces. That the culture of Gilan is unique and different is emphasized in lines 11–13, where Roya claims the culture of people in Gilan differs tremendously from the culture of other provinces (farhange mardome gilān zamin tā āsemun ba farhange baqiye ostānā farq mikone). She stresses this discrepancy by using the word tremendously when comparing the difference between the culture of Gilan and other provinces. She then goes on to concretize these cultural differences by speaking about the tremendous differences in the music and ballads (museqi and tarāne) (l. 15–17) of the Gilaks, their myths
(asātirešun) (l. 17), the stories told to the children (l. 18–23), the poems that are joyous and merry (tarab o šādi) (l. 24), and the peaceful culture (farhange āsudegi) (l. 26). Music, ballads, myths, stories are all part of a people’s culture, thus the culture of the Gilaks is described by Roya as different, calmer, merry, joyous, and peaceful. Thus the Gilaki culture is illustrated in words with a more positive tone to them than for example the stories and culture of people in mountain areas that are about heroes and wars (l. 20–22). Heroes are generally perceived as something positive, but are in this context explicitly paired with war, which is highly negative. In this context, the stories of the grandmothers in the mountain areas can be seen as negative when they are contrasted with the culture of Gilan that is described solely in positive terms.

The peaceful culture is also a topic that was discussed in illustration 10, where Roya spoke about the protection the Alborz Mountain Range provided which made it possible for Gilan to stay out of most wars, attacks and invasions, and have its own local leaders. According to Roya, that was the reason for the people of Gilan to have their own distinct culture.

As Roya is the participant in both examples 10 and 11, one can see that she contrasts (the people of) Gilan and Rasht with four other categories: other cities; mountain areas; desert areas; and other provinces, where the contrast is construed as having differences in culture. When contrasting the culture of Gilan with other cultures, Roya refers to the culture of Gilan as their culture (farhangešun) (l. 25–26). As in the previous example she uses their when speaking about the Gilaks, but here it is not a question of historical events or eras. Rather it may derive from the question in lines 1–3. The question is not posed in a way that asks about Roya’s life specifically; rather what is asked is what the differences are between Rasht and other cities in general, which of course may have influenced the answer given by the participants and the pronouns used.

In the following example, the participants discuss the culture of Gilan and how it differs from other places in Iran. In doing so, they also give what they believe are the historical events that have led to these differences.

Example 12. The European influence
In this staged conversation, the participants are Kamand (K) and her friend Samira (S), Kamand’s mother Mrs Saberi (MS), and the researcher (P). This example follows a discussion where the two participants have talked about Rasht and other Iranian cities, such as Esfahan, Bojnord and Mashhad. What has been discussed is how restricted women and girls in those cities are, how badly they are treated by men, and Samira has told us about her sister who was very poorly treated as a
student in Mashhad when people found out she was from Rasht. Here she continues by telling about her aunt, and how the aunt experiences life in Tabriz, the province capital of the South Azerbaijan Province situated in North-western Iran.

1 S: tu tabriz tu tabriz asan zendegi
   In Tabriz you can’t even live in Tabriz

2 S: nemisse kard ammeye man tabrize asan
   my aunt lives in Tabriz for

3 S: mas- arayeš mige ma nemitunim dar
   exam- make-up she says we can’t under

4 S: halate åddi xeili saxe miše
   normal circumstances it’s very hard for us to

5 S: arayeš kard raft birun (. ) xeili bad
   put on make-up and go out (. ) they stare in

6 S: negah mikonan o ° ina°
   a very bad way and °like that°

7 K: na rašt xeili beht[ar
   no Rasht is much better

8 S: [rašt xeili behtare
   Rasht is much better

9 S: bâ har su- vaziyati bâz
   no matter wh- whatever the circumstances

10 S: miše raft birun
    it’s still possible to go out

11 K: åre farhange maxsuse
    yes a special culture

12 MS: unjâ ta: sob ziyâde
    there is a lot of bigotry there

13 S: xe[ili
    lots

14 MS: [tuye Tabr[iz
    in Tabriz

15 S: [åre xeili
    yes lots

16 P: šomâ masan fek mikoin ke rašt masan
    why do you think it’s like this in Rasht

17 P: čerâ intoriye râhatare:
    more comfortable?
K: (.) man dalile tārixišo hamin uh (.) I heard the historical reason

K: {čand ruz piš az bābām šenidam} ke {a couple of days ago from my dad} it’s

K: bexātere inke eh čiz (.) rašt masan because uh this (.) Rasht for example

K: az tarafe eh daryāye xazar o in[ā from the uh the Caspian Sea and you know

S: {rusiye Russia

K: be samte orupā inā bud yani it was close to Europe it was in fact

K: darvāzaš bud dar vāqe y[e its gateway it was a

S: [ā: ye-

K: rāhe ertebāti bud vāse hamin a way of communication and that’s why

K: orupāyihā xeili injā miumadan (.) the Europeans would come here a lot (.)

K: vāse hamin xo farhangāšun taqir karde that’s why their culture changed

K: be eh tadrij with uh with time

(.)

K: [vāse hamine that’s why

S: [manam hamino šenidam (giggle) that’s what I’ve heard as well (giggle)

K: āre yes

This example starts with the participants contrasting Rasht with the city of Tabriz, by Samira claiming that it is impossible to even live in Tabriz, you can’t even live in Tabriz (tu tabriz asan zendegi nemiše kard) (l. 1). To back up her statement she quotes her aunt who lives in Tabriz by saying under normal circumstances it’s
very hard for us to put on make-up and go out (. ) they stare in a very bad way (mā nemitunim dar hālāte āddi xeili saxt miše ārayeš kard raft birun (. ) xeili bad negāh mikonan) (l. 3–5). Active voicing is a discursive means used by a speaker in conversation to back up his or her claims. By quoting her aunt who lives in Tabriz, Samira can legitimise her previous remark about how one cannot live in Tabriz. The aunt can be seen as an authority in the matter as she is both older and lives in Tabriz, which means that she has plenty of direct experience of how hard it can be for women to wear make-up in the public sphere in Tabriz. What Samira’s aunt claims, according to Samira at least, is that women cannot wear make-up and be present in the public sphere in Tabriz without being stared at. Samira, however, draws parallels between not being able to wear make-up in public and not being able to live in Tabriz at all. Samira then continues by contrasting Rasht with Tabriz when she speaks about how it is possible to go out in Rasht regardless of the circumstances (l. 9–10). As Kamand does in example 10, the participants in this example make relevant the social category of gender and the appearance of the women when they discuss what they believe constitutes the contrasts between Rasht/Gilan and other places in Iran.

Samira is also supported, in her claims, by Kamand who contrasts Rasht with Tabriz by stating that Rasht is much better (rašt xeili behare) (l. 8), upgrading her claim by using the word much. The issue of culture appears in line 11 as Kamand recycles her statement from line 8 regarding Rasht, and builds on it as she speaks about the special culture (farhange maxsuse) that can be found in Rasht. It is, however, not fully described how this culture is special, as Mrs Saberi starts speaking about Tabriz having a lot of bigotry (ta:sob ziyāde) (l. 12), and is backed up by Samira in lines 13 and 15 who says lots (xeili). All of these enhancements and utterances reinforce the image of differences that according to the participants exist between Rasht and Tabriz, where Tabriz is depicted as the worse of the two with restrictions for women and lots of bigotry.

The participants are then asked why they think life in Rasht is more comfortable (rāhatare) (l. 16–17), even though they have talked about Rasht being better. As Kamand attempts to answer the question, she brings up the historical eras of Gilan Province. Here, she speaks about the Caspian Sea, which she claims is the reason for the cultural differences. Kamand starts by saying that she learnt the historical reason quite recently from her dad, which can be seen as yet another case of active voicing. That she refers to her father is a way for Kamand to further legitimize her arguments, similar to how Samira referred to her aunt when speaking about the differences between Rasht and Tabriz. In both cases, the participants use people they see as authorities, in Samira’s case an aunt who has first-hand experience, and here Kamand uses her dad who is both older and in her world a
person who has more (historical) knowledge and whom she has confidence in. Kamand gives her father as a reference when she argues for the differences between Rasht and other places. This can be linked to Halbwachs’s belief concerning collective memory, and how groups provide memories that individuals have not experienced first hand. None of the participants, and not even Kamand’s father, were alive during these historical events she gives an account of. The belief that Rasht is freer due to historical events is being passed on here from one generation to the next. According to Le Goff (1998) collective memory can then function as a mechanism used to transfer knowledge and cultural capital to future generations.

According to Kamand the Caspian Sea has enabled foreign influence as Europeans came to Rasht and changed its culture. In line 22, Samira says Russia as she hears the beginning of Kamand’s explanation. She does not explain this any further as Kamand continues talking, and in the rest of the example there is no more mention of Russia, only Europeans. It is, however, apparent that Samira has heard the explanation of foreign presence enabled through the Caspian Sea as well since she is so quick to mention Russia, but also because she claims in line 32 to have heard the same explanation as the one presented by Kamand.

It is noteworthy that while the Alborz Mountain Range was used by Roya to illustrate a geographical feature providing protection and isolation against invasions, threats and influences from the south, the influence from northern neighbours (Russians and Europeans) is considered a positive factor. In contrast to the Alborz Mountains, the Caspian Sea has been a way of communication (rāhe erte-bāti) (l. 26), and made it possible for Europeans to come to Gilan and influence its culture (l. 27–28). By stating that the culture of Gilan has been influenced by Europeans (and possibly Russians, even though Samira only mentions this briefly and as a confirmation that she has heard a similar explanation) the participants show that they associate the people of Rasht and ultimately themselves with Europeans rather than the rest of Iran, which has not enjoyed these influences and changes. The contacts made possible through the Sea are, according to the participants, something that has enabled the culture of Rasht to change in a direction that is better. Similar arguments can be seen in the following example.

Example 13. Connecting bridge
The participants in this staged conversation are Azar (A), Fariba (F), Taban (T), and the researcher (P). We met after the girls finished their classes at Guilan University and the girls thought it to be best to conduct the interview at a café. Prior to this example the participants mentioned the openness of Rasht and its people’s
Desire to develop and evolve, and when asked why, they start speaking about the historical reasons and the links of Rasht to Russia and Europe.

1. F: Mīduni čīye: eh un zamunā: eh (.) asan you know what uh in those days uh (.) the
2. F: Šomā:l (.) šomāle kešva:r ye pole North (.) the North the country was a
3. F: ertebātī bud dige tu zamunāye xeili qadim connecting bridge in the really old days
4. F: dāram migam (.) eh āre beyne irān rusiye I mean (.) uh yes between Iran and Russia
5. F: asan darvāżeye orupā migoftan they even called Anzali the gateway to Europe
6. F: un moqehā anzaliro (.) hattā anzaliro in those days (.) even Anzali
7. F: bexātere un eskele (.) o eh čizeš beheš because of that jetty (.) and uh its stuff they
8. F: migoftan darvāżeye orupā va xeili would call it the gateway to Europe and lots of
9. F: ketāb o eh (.) asan ketābā az in books and uh (.) books would even enter from
10. F: ta- samt vāred mišoda:n (.) yā hattā this dire- this way (.) or even
11. F: mod (.) hamine (.) mardome fashion (.) it’s this (.) for people
12. F: injā in qaziye eh vāseye eh eh masalan here this thing uh it’s uh uh for example
13. F: bexātere yeki do sāle axir nist not only for the past couple of years they have
14. F: hamiše nesbat be zamāne xodešun in juri always been like this in regard to their
15. F: budan šā- man fekr mikonam tasireš eh az time may- I think the effect uh is
16. F: in bāše ke xeili saritar az mardome because that much faster than people
17. F: jāhāye dige (.) bā in masāel in other places (.) they became acquainted
19 F: āšenā šodan
    with these matters

20 T: na faqat vorude ye čizāyi mesle ketāb
    not only the arrival of things like books

21 T: o mod ā (. ) fekr nemikonam ādamāyiam
    and fashion (. ) I think the people

22 T: ke īnjā zendegi mikardan be har āl
    living here after all

23 T: rusā xeili īnjā zendegi mikardan (. )
    lots of Russians lived here (. )

24 T: [hamin alāneš
    even today

25 F: [āre (. ) hast ā
    yes (. ) it’s true

26 T: miri tu anzali: (. ) xeili injuri
    if you go to Anzali (. ) it’s a lot like that

27 T: ā[re (giggle)
    yes (giggle)

28 A: [šāyad alān jade {xodem[un °(x)°]
    maybe our {own ancestors °(x)°}

29 F: [(laughing)

30 F: {āre momkene jaddemun rusi bāše} xeili
    {yes our ancestors might be Russians} you

32 F: ādamāyiro mibini az kešvarāye dige
    see that lots of people would

33 F: miumadan °(x)° zendegi mikardan
    come °(x)° from other countries to live

34 F: mosallaman ta:sir dāste
    of course it has made an impact

This example starts with Fariba contrasting the North (šomāl) (l. 1–2) with the rest of the country, and specifies it more in line 2 by saying the North of the country (šomāle kešvar). Here, the geography is highlighted when she speaks especially about northern Iran, which according to her constitutes its own part of the country. According to Fariba the north was a connecting bridge (ye pole ertebāti) between Iran and Russia (l. 2–3). She continues by speaking about northern Iran as an entity, but it is only the port city of Anzali, a port city situated in Gilan and about 42 km from Rasht, that is mentioned specifically in lines 5 and 6. Anzali is
depicted as the gateway to Europe (darvâzeye orupā), which is mentioned twice in lines 5 and 9. Anzali is also mentioned in line 26, when Taban speaks about the many Russians that lived there. It is only the city of Anzali, that is referred to as the gateway to Europe and for books, fashion, and people (Russians and people from other countries) (l. 10, 12, 20, 21, 23, and 30–33).

In her description of these historical events Fariba uses words, such as bridge (pol), gateway (darvâze), and jetty (eskele) (l. 3, 5, 8 and 9). What these words have in common is that they all in some way bring communication to mind. In this example it is communication and the relationship with Russians and the positive effect it has had on the region that is of great importance.

Like the previous examples, the participants speak about culture when contrasting their environment with the rest of the country. In this specific example, they do not mention the word culture, but Fariba speaks about the books and fashion that came, both of which can be seen as belonging to culture. Fariba sees the foreign influence as a way for the people of the North and Anzali to be more developed when she says in lines 14–16 they have always been like this in regard to their time (hamiše nesbat be zamāne xodešun in juri budan). What is also apparent in Fariba’s explanation is a sense of place identity, in that she believes that people belonging to a certain place have specific features that distinguish them from others, in this case people in the North have been influenced by what was brought to their region through the Caspian Sea.

That the time aspect is significant can be shown rather early in this example when Fariba speaks about when the events took place in the really old days (tu zamunāye xeili qadim) (l. 3), but also the past tense of the verbs, they even called Anzali the gateway to Europe in those days (darvâzeye orupā migoftan un moqehā anzaliro) (l. 5–6) and books would even enter from this dire- this way (asan ketābā az in ta- samt vāred mišodan) (l. 10–11). She continues by saying they have always been like this in regard to their time may- I think the effect uh is because that compared to people in other places (.) they became acquainted with these matters (hamiše nesbat be zamāne xodešun in juri budan šā- man fekr mikonam tasireš eh az in bāše ke xeili saritar az mardome jāhāye dige (. ) bā in masāel āšenā šodan) (l. 14–19). According to Fariba, the geographical aspect has influenced the history of the province which still today has the effect that its people are distinguished from people in other places (mardome jāhāye dige) (l. 17–18). This brings the notion of collective memory to mind as the participants give geographical and historical arguments as the reason for the uniqueness of the people of this region. A similar explanation was given by Kamand in the previous example as to why their region is different from other places in Iran. Both expla-
nations are based on the fact that the Caspian Sea functioned as a way of communication with Europe and Russia. In this example collective memory is apparent when Fariba at first explains how the north of the country and Anzali have functioned as a gateway for Europe and Russia to Iran. Her claims are later repeated by Taban (l. 19–23).

That the participants perceive Russian influence as positive is also noticeable in lines 29–30 where they joke about potential foreign ancestors, Russians and Europeans residing in northern Iran thanks to the Caspian Sea and the geography of Gilan having made an impact, according to Fariba (l. 32–34). The participants speak about the gateway to Europe, but mention only Russians, which is interesting as Russia spans both Europe and Asia. In line 23 Taban mentions that a lot of Russians lived in the region, which brings Azar to speculate on possible foreign ancestors in lines 28, which also makes her giggle. Speaking about possible foreign ancestors enables the other participants to speak about it as well. Taban is backed up by Fariba, who says yes our ancestors might be Russian you see that lots of people would come °x° from other countries to live ([fāre momkene jadde-mun rusi bāše] xeili ādamāyiro mibini az kešvaraye dige miūmadan °x° zendegi mikardan) (l. 30–33). In lines 27–29, the participants giggle, laugh and speak in a laughing tone. Laughing and giggling can be used in speech for various reasons. Here it could be seen as the participants being embarrassed when speaking about the sex lives of their ancestors and their possible liaisons with foreigners. The participants strengthen their statements about the impact foreigners have had on the society they live in by speculating about possible Russian and foreign ancestry, and further affiliate themselves with Russians and people from other countries who would enter the North and Anzali through the Caspian Sea. They are also indirectly contrasting themselves with the rest of the Iranian population, who have not had the possibility of being in contact with foreigners, much less having children with them.

Fariba finishes the sequence by claiming that there have been a lot of people from other countries who used to come to and of course it has made an impact (mosallaman ta:sir dāšte) (l. 34). She does not explain whether this impact has been good or bad, but looking at the entire example, and how the participants describe their relation to foreigners in terms of access to books and fashion, and possible ancestry, one can conclude that the impact they have in mind is positive. Collective memory plays a great role in all of these examples, where the participants identify with a place (in this study the North, Gilan, Anzali and/or Rasht) and categorise the people of that place with certain social attributes and activities.
6.5. Concluding discussions

In this chapter the focus has been on showing how geography and collective memory are used when identities are established and negotiated in the staged conversations. Geography functions as one aspect of the conceptualisation of why Gilan/Rasht and its population are unique in comparison to other groups of people in the rest of the country, using discursive means such as active voicing, labelling and word choice, giggling and laughing, extreme-case formulations, positioning, and contrasting. Another kind of resource for making social categories visible is the use of category-bound attributes.

This chapter shows how the participants emphasize differences between the Rashtis and Gilaks and the rest of the country. By accentuating contrasts, in this case between people from Rasht and people from other regions and cities, normative expectations of how members of different groups behave are described by the participants. The participants contrast themselves with other groups of people, in order to distinguish their own identities as Rashti or Gilaki and show how a Rashti/Gilaki identity is different (and better) than that of other Iranians. In all examples the participants do this by describing the people of Gilan and Rasht in positive words, while people belonging to other cities and regions are described in more negative terms. For example, the participants discuss how Gilaks and Rashtis have been protected from invasions and attacks, have escaped being influenced by other people, and have been able to rule themselves as they have had their own separate leaders. According to the participants, the people in Gilan Province have also enjoyed contacts with Russians and Europeans, which have accordingly led to a distinct Gilaki culture. Culture (farhang) is a recurring concept in all of the examples of this chapter when the participants distinguish themselves from the rest of Iran. The fact that culture is so significant for them will be analysed further in chapter 7.

The discussion revolving around the differences between different groups makes it possible for the participants to re-negotiate shared expectations, and they can distance themselves from attributes they perceive as negative, such as bigotry, not being able to put on make-up and go out, and being heroic and participating in wars. Heroic is generally perceived as positive, but in example 11. “The Mediterranean lifestyle”, it is linked to war stories, and contrasted with the calmer stories of Gilan, which depicts being a hero as negative. The participants also associate positive attributes with themselves and their group, such as being able to wear make-up, decorative clothing, being ahead of their time, having their own leaders, being spared from partaking in wars, enjoying a tremendously different culture that is peaceful, and consisting of joyous and merry poetry and calmer
stories. They also affiliate themselves with Europeans and Russians whom they portray as having had a positive effect on the regional culture.

The participants in this study discuss a regional identity for the people of Rasht and Gilan that differs from other Iranians, and they describe this identity in relation to the geography of the province. While the Caspian Sea and the port of Anzali has enabled communication with Europe and Russia and an influx of books, fashion and ideas, the Alborz Mountain Range has kept the Arabs and other southern invaders at arm’s length, ensuring local leaders rule Gilan Province and keeping it semi-independent from the central government of Iran.

Collective memory and place identity are used by the participants in order to point out a continuity concerning a distinct Rashti/Gilaki identity. According to the participants, the geography of Gilan Province has enabled certain historical events, such as a lack of invasions and attacks from the south and communication with Russia and Europe through the north, which have all had a long lasting impact on the culture of the region. This impact can still be seen today when Gilan and Rasht are contrasted with other Iranian provinces and cities. These explanations are de facto not self-experienced by the participants, but as collective memory is linked to a specific place, people do not need to have experienced certain events in order to associate themselves with the labels and identities linked to that place. As seen in the examples, the participants have not actually experienced the presence of Europeans and Russians in Gilan, but still they claim that there is a unique Gilaki and Rashti identity that is contrasted with the rest of the country due to positive foreign influence on the local culture. Simultaneously, collective memory plays a role when it comes to southern influences, for example when Roya (example 11) speaks about how Gilan has been spared from attacks, invasion, and influences from the Arabs and other people as Gilan has always had its own separate leaders.

When discussing the city and their identity as Rashtis compared to originating from other cities in Iran, the participants were overwhelmingly positive when speaking about the way of life and culture of Rasht and Gilan. The participants speak about their attachment to the city of Rasht as well as Gilan Province, and the traits they associate as belonging to this specific area. According to the participants, there is a Rashti identity that sets the people of the city apart from the rest of the country. In several of the examples in this chapter, the participants give historical events as an explanation as to why the people of Rasht and Gilan are different from people in other cities and provinces. This makes the issue of collective memory significant, for example used by one generation to pass on cultural knowledge to the next generation. This can be seen in some of the examples in
this chapter, where the participants use active voicing to illustrate how their parents have explained the uniqueness of the Rashti identity as an outcome of historical and geographical factors. The historical events the participants speak about are the Arab invasion of Iran, European and Russian influence, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. None of the participants in this study have experienced any of these events, including the Islamic Revolution, which occurred in modern times.

In some contexts and studies, the social categories of age and generation can be used in order to contrast with groups belonging to other cohorts and generations, but in this context the participants associate themselves with the older generations when establishing their identity. They achieve this affiliation by speaking about how the people of their region have always been before their time thanks to foreign influence from the north, and how they have been spared from unwanted influences from the south. In terms of intersectionality, the social category of gender is also highlighted and shown to intersect with geography and region, in that the participants discuss attributes such as decorative clothing, fashion, and make-up, when they talk about the differences between the Gilaki and Rashti women compared to women living in other cities and regions. The social category of gender and how it is used by the participants of this study to constitute a Gilaki/Rashti identity will be discussed further in the following chapter.
7. The Rashti identity in relation to gender

7.1. Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to show how the social category of gender is used when identities are established and negotiated by the participants. The participants highlight gender when they define how Rashtis, and in some respects how Gilaks are. What emerges in this chapter is not so much the participants’ roles as women, but as women (and men) from Rasht, and how gender roles in Rasht contrast with gender roles in the rest of the country. The focus is on the category-bound activities and attributes associated with the Rashti identity, especially in regard to how men and women should look and behave in Iran. The participants highlight certain activities and attributes that are linked to Rashti men and women, and how they differ from men and women in the rest of the country. Rashti men come into focus as the participants highlight their role vis-à-vis the freedom Rashti women enjoy in regard to appearance and behaviour. Besides category-bound activities and attributes, the main discursive means used in the analyses of this chapter are: contrasting, active voicing, and extreme-case formulations.

In the conversations, three aspects of gender are brought up by the participants when they constitute their identity as young Rashti women, and thus distance themselves from girls and women living in other cities and provinces. Section 7.2. functions as a background and concerns the concept of gender. Section 7.3. deals with how the participants speak about the significance of appearance and clothing in Rasht and how there is a connection between clothing and the degree of religiosity. In the following section, 7.4., the participants discuss the presence of the women of Rasht and Gilan in public spaces, and their interaction with men. Section 7.5. concerns the importance of Rashti men in regard to the freedom of Rashti girls and women, especially in regard to appearance, and how this is frowned upon by Iranian men in other places. The chapter is summed up with concluding discussions in section 7.6.
7.2. Gender theory

Like age, sex is a biological category that functions as the basis of distinction between roles, norms and expectations in society. Gender, which is the social construction of sex, is based upon these roles, norms, and expectations. Gender differences are complex, and gender roles create separate ways for men and women to address life, society, and culture. Like other social categories, such as ethnicity and class, gender is a social construction and can intersect with other social phenomena, which is why gender should be perceived as social practice. According to Eckert (1997: 213–215), gender roles are not only different, but also consensual, leading to men and women not evaluating their status in relation to each other, but within their groups, meaning that men value their social status in relation to other men, whereas women value their social status in relation to other women. This can be seen in this chapter, where the participants mainly evaluate their status and roles in relation to women in the rest of the country through contrasting, rather than compared to men in Rasht or men in the rest of the country.

While earlier work on gender and language (Fishman 1983; Preisler 1986; Tannen 1991) saw talk as simply reflecting social identities, categorisations, and inequalities, more recent gender and language studies have conceptualised gender as performative and talk-in-interaction as a means of producing (and reproducing) gendered identities (Cameron 1997; Kitzinger 2000; 2005a, 2005b, Speer 2005; Stokoe 2004; Stokoe and Smithson 2001; Weatherall 2002; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2003, 2007).

In 1967, Garfinkel published a groundbreaking work, a case study of Agnes, a 19-year-old transsexual. In his work Garfinkel studied and analysed the practices of the “managed achievement of sex status” (Garfinkel 1967: 116). The aim of the study was to demonstrate how people make sense of the world, display their understanding of it, and make their activities rational and reportable for all practical purposes (Garfinkel 1967: vii). Through his study Garfinkel produced the theory that normal sexuality is accomplished through witnessable displays of talk and conduct (Garfinkel 1967: 180).

West and Zimmerman (1978) and Kessler and McKenna (1978) elaborated Garfinkel’s work as the “doing gender” theory, arguing that gender is a social accomplishment, and is therefore something one does and not something one has. They suggest that gender is “a situated accomplishment” and “the local management of conduct in relation to normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities for practical sex categories” (West and Fenstermaker 1993: 156). In the same vein, Butler describes gender as performative, meaning that “it
is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler 1990b: 278). Furthermore, gender is a repeated stylisation of the body, “repeated acts performed within a highly rigid regulatory frame”, which over time produce the illusion of a “natural” kind of being (Butler 1990a: 33). Gender is formed through the repeating of actions and the illusions of a natural and constant gender (Stokoe and Smithson 2001: 224).

The gendered world depends on a common awareness and understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman, resulting in expectations of how men and women should look and behave, respectively (Speer and Stokoe 2011: 45). Since “doing gender” demands alertness from the members, they must manage their behaviour in accordance with cultural norms with regard to gender. In cases where they do not live up to the normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity, they risk being judged and negatively appraised (West and Fenstermaker 2002: 541).

The reason why MCA and category-bound activities and attributes are suitable for the “doing gender” theory is based on the fact that MCA is “concerned with the organisation of common-sense knowledge in terms of categories members employ in accomplishing their activities in and through talk” (Francis and Hester 2004: 21). Hester and Eglin (1997: 4) note that category-bound activities are those expected and appropriately done by individuals who are members of specific categories. This can for example be seen in Wowk’s study from 1984, an analysis of a murder confession, where she illustrates how certain attributes or actions are bound to the categories of “gender” and especially the category “female”, or transformations of it such as “girl” or “woman” (Wowk 1984: 76). A membership categorisation approach provides an explanation of how the everyday gendering of interaction is not based on claims made about women and/or men’s interactional style. Rather it shows how taken-for-granted facts about gender-appropriate behaviour are consistently worked out in talk.

7.3. The significance of appearance and clothing in Rasht

In this first empirical section the participants discuss the importance of appearance and clothing for the people of Rasht, how it can be seen as part of their identity, and how it contrasts them with people from other parts of Iran. In the first two examples of this section, the participants discuss the importance of appearance in Rasht, while the final two examples concern the conflicts that can arise in the encounter between the people of Rasht and the rest of the country. As can be read in chapter 4, there are connections between religiosity and how people (especially
women) dress. This is mentioned and discussed by the participants in the following examples. Even when the participants do not always mention religion explicitly when discussing how a person dresses and/or behaves, my experience in the field has made it possible for me to understand the parallels drawn between religiosity and appearance.

Example 14. The importance of appearance in Gilan
The participants in this example are Fariba (F), Taban (T), Azar (A), and the researcher (P). The participants have been discussing differences between Rasht and other cities, and here they continue the discussion in regard to clothing and appearance.

1 T: albate ye čizi ke āzar goft va
   but there was something Azar said and

2 T: harfe qabliš bištar tu rašt hākeme tā
what she said before is more prevalent

3 T: šahrāye dige un qadi ke rašt be lebās o
in Rasht than other cities as much as Rasht

4 T: zāhere xodeš [mirese
is concerned with its clothes and looks

5 A: [na na na hast
no no no there is

6 A: man xodam vāse anzaliam (.) eh m[axsus-
I myself am from Anzali (.) uh especial-

7 T: [na
no

8 T: manzuram
what I mean

9 A: anzali xeili šabiye rašte na hamejā
Anzali is much like Rasht no it’s like this

10 A: hast (.) alān dige hamejā hast
everywhere (.) now it’s like this everywhere

11 (.)

12 T: na hičvaxt masan to tuye qom (.) yā
no for example in Qom (.) or

13 T: [yazd
Yazd it’s never
Here, Taban begins by saying that the people of Rasht are very concerned with their looks and clothing. By describing the people of Rasht like this, Taban contrasts the people of Rasht with other cities. Here, the social category of Rashtis is contrasted with people living in other big Iranian cities, such as Qom, Yazd and Tehran.
In order to strengthen her claims Taban starts her statement (l. 1–3) by referring back to a comment Azar made earlier in the conversation about how much young women in Gilan care about their appearance, and that they would spend all the money they make on their looks. But instead of aligning, Azar shows disagreement in lines 5–6 and 9–10 by repeatedly objecting to what Taban is saying, and instead claiming that the people of Anzali are just as concerned with their appearance, thus describing the people of these two cities as alike. In lines 9–10 Azar states that no it’s like this everywhere (. ) now it’s like this everywhere (na hamejā hast (. ) alān dige hamejā hast).

As Taban and Azar have failed to agree, Taban starts anew in line 12 by saying no for example in Qom (. ) or Yazd it’s never (na hičvaqt masan to tuye qom (. ) yā yazd). Claiming that there is never the same focus on appearance in cities like Qom or Yazd involves using an extreme-case formulation, in order to strengthen her statement and contrast the people of Rasht with people of Qom and Yazd. It is worth noting, however, that Taban’s extreme-case formulation is not produced until after Azar’s claim, and is a defence against the claim that everywhere is the same and her own claim that Rasht is different from other places. What can also be seen is that the social category of religion is brought up by Azar who claims that Taban’s statement is not valid, as these two cities are very religious. By saying that these two cities are religious, Azar contrasts being religious with being concerned with ones clothes and looks. It is because Qom and Yazd are so religious, that they cannot be compared to Rasht where people are more concerned with their appearance. In the following examples, similar opinions are expressed by the participants as they describe Rashtis as more concerned with their looks and less concerned with religion, while the opposite is said to be true for people living in other Iranian cities.

Once again Azar signals disagreement in lines 14–15, claiming that Qom is so religious and therefore so different that is cannot be compared to Rasht. In lines 16–17, Taban brings up Tehran, and once more she is contradicted by Azar who says that she used to live there for a couple of years and has some experience of how the Tehran people dress and how important looks are for them. By bringing up her own experience of life in Tehran, Azar shows “expertise”, and strengthens her claims when contradicting Taban. As Tehran is the capital of Iran, one might think that appearance would be of great importance for its population, as fashion trends usually arise and spread from bigger cities and capitals. In this example, however, Azar states that not even in Tehran do people care as much as in Rasht about these things (tehrānešam masan hattā ungadi tu ke rašt be in čhiza ahamiyat mide) (l. 18–19), and as much as they care about it here they do not
care there (unqadi ke injā tavajoh mišeunjā tavajoh nemiše) (l. 22–23). According to Azar, the young people of Rasht care even more than the people of Tehran, when it comes to clothes and looks. Even the capital of the country, as a centre of fashion and new trends and not as religious as cities like Qom and Yazd, is different and contrasted with Rasht. There is a connection in the participants’ statements regarding religiosity and being traditional on one hand and being keen about looks and style on the other, and it is used as leverage to argue the case. The participants describe being religious as not caring too much about their looks and style. However, the people of Tehran are described as not caring too much about how they look, but at the same time no one describes the people of Tehran as traditional and religious.

What is also interesting is that at the beginning of this example, it was Azar who stated that it was not only Rasht, but also Anzali (which is also a city in Gilan), that is different from other cities, but here she herself only speaks about Rasht when contrasting it with Tehran.

In lines 25–29 Taban makes her fourth attempt to make her point, as she returns to her previous claim and states that the people of Rasht care so much about their appearances that it is part of their features and characteristics (joze xususiyāt o vijegihāšune), and that is what sets the people of Rasht apart from the people in rest of the country. Here Taban changes her claim about the people of Rasht, and instead states that it is the people of Gilan who care a lot about their appearance. The adjustment from Rasht to the entire province can be seen as a significant part of the repair, and functions as reconciliation, thus allowing the participants to reach a consensus and closure. According to Taban, people in Gilan are so concerned with the way they look that it has actually become part of their features and characteristics. This she also finds amusing, so that she almost giggles when she says this. In the final turn of this sequence, Fariba, who has otherwise been quiet throughout, agrees by saying yes (āre) (l. 30).

Throughout this example, the participants also bring up different category-bound attributes and activities, which they link to different groups of people. People from Rasht and Anzali are described as being very concerned about their appearance, to the extent that is part of their features and characteristics. This is contrasted with being very religious, which is connected to the people of Qom. It is interesting that Tehran, as the capital and a cosmopolitan city, is contrasted with Rasht, even though it is not described as religious.

In the following example, the participants discuss how religion is brushed aside when it comes to clothing and appearance, and that a Rashti woman might not consider a more modest way of dressing even when she grows older.
Example 15. The old woman in the milk queue
The people present in this example are Shahnaz (Sh), Nasim (N), and the researcher (P). We are at the office of the NGO where the participants work as volunteers, and the participants are discussing the stance of the Rashti people towards religion. Previous to this example the participants have been talking about how girls are wearing shorter and tighter māntos\textsuperscript{20}, compared to previous years.

1 Sh: āre ye seri (.) masan be qo:le bačehā
yes some (.) for example young people

2 Sh: migoftan gilāniā pertimazhaban
would say the Gilaks are indifferent to their

3 Sh: yā maslan (.) yā enqadr namāz mixunan
religion or for example (.) either they pray

4 Sh: {ruze migiran yā asan in kāro nemikonan}
{fast a lot or not at all}

5 Sh: (.) mā un [tori hastim
(.) we’re like that

6 N: [masan yāru
like she

7 N: čador gozāšte bud zane qadim (.) alān
had a chador on woman of old times (.) nowadays

8 N: masan(.) xeili hejāb tuye masan
for example (.) lots of hijab in for example

9 N: (.r) ye edde čadori ijād šode (.)
(.r) recently some are wearing the chador (.)

10 N: vali masan čadorēšo az in zir pāhāye
but like she showed her white chubby

11 N: topole sefideš miāvord birun (.) masalan
legs from beneath the chador (.) she’s

12 N: birun kafše pāšinedār puşide (.) az un
got like high-heels on outside (.) and at the

13 N: var muhāye meškardeš birun
other end her bleached hair is out and for

\textsuperscript{20} A mānto is a coat worn over the clothing, with the purpose of covering the female body as much as possible when girls and women are present in public places, even though it is more revealing than a čador. Women wear the mānto over their clothes, in order to cover at least their behind and thighs as well as their arms.
This example comes after the participants have discussed how the people of Rasht influence people who come to Rasht to be more aware of their looks and appearance, as well as to change their beliefs. Here, Shahnaz highlights certain category-bound attributes as she quotes “young people”, who according to her, claim that people in Gilan do not care much about religion (l. 1–5), making the social category of religion relevant as she speaks about Gilaks. However, in lines 3–5 there is a repair as she adjusts her statement and states that the people of Gilan are extreme when it comes to religion, either by not caring at all or by overdoing their religious duties. Shahnaz concludes that this is the way we are, thus associating herself with the people of Gilan.
Upon hearing Shahnaz’s description of the Gilaks and their approach to religion, Nasim speaks about the women of old times who would wear the chador\textsuperscript{21}. She then says that recently there are some women who also wear the chador, but who do not really abide by the rules of hijab\textsuperscript{22}. As chador is considered by Iranians as more covering, and used by more pious and conservative women, this can be seen as an implicit way of bringing up religion. While in the following example, 16., “The influence of the Rashti people”, the chador is seen as a sign of being traditional and religious and ignoring one’s looks, Nasim discusses here how Rashti women put on a chador and are still concerned about how they look. According to Nasim, the chador which is often seen as very strict hijab, as it covers the entire body has become the new thing. In lines 6–15 and 17–26, she gives two examples of how Rashtı women wearing a chador might look in the public space. In the first example religion becomes apparent when she speaks about this elderly lady and how she dresses in public. According to Nasim, the woman would put on a chador, but from beneath the chador, the woman’s body was visible to public eyes. As can be read in chapter 4, the chador is perceived as a stricter and more restrictive form of hijab compared to the mānto and veil in Iranian society, but the way the woman’s legs, high-heels, bleached hair, and cleavage (l. 10–14), can be seen by others from beneath the chador, it goes completely against the rules of modesty and decency that the Iranian government dictate. Here, religion is then contrasted with Rashtı women’s wish to care about their appearance. Even when wearing a stricter hijab, Rashtı women make sure to show that the way they look is more important than abiding by religious rules and regulations, as well as the state’s norms for modesty.

In line 16 Shahnaz starts a continuation by murmuring and saying you know (\textit{miduni}), and then laughs. Whatever Shahnaz meant to say is cut off as Nasim continues with yet another exemplification. This time it concerns a woman her mother has seen and told her about. By using her mother’s story, Nasim is strengthening her statement about how much looks and appearance matter in Rasht. In line 16 Nasim tells us about an elderly lady seen by her mother who goes to the grocery store to get some milk early in the morning. The lady is described as very keen on looking her best by putting on \textit{lots of foundation and stuff (yek ālame kerempudr mālide bud felān besār)} and lots of make-up (l. 22). For this Rashti woman, it seems natural to wear a lot of make-up even when doing

\textsuperscript{21} The chador is a large piece of cloth worn as a long cloak, with the purpose of covering a woman from the head down to the feet, and is usually kept in place with one hand.

\textsuperscript{22} The hijab is a veil covering the head and chest, often worn by Muslim women in the presence of adult males outside of their immediate family as a way of conforming to a certain standard of modesty.
simple chores in the morning, but for Nasim’s mother who is not originally a Gilak, this is very surprising (l. 18–21). Nasim uses active voicing to illustrate how her mother comments on what she has seen by saying this early in the morning she’s come to the milk queue what and has put on kilos of make-up (in kalleye sob umade tā safe šir ċi yek man xodešo mālide:) (l. 24–26). At the beginning of this conversation Nasim has talked about her mother, and explained that she has lived in Rasht for nearly 30 years, and yet she finds this kind of behaviour very surprising (xeili ta:job bud) (l. 19–20). In this way, Nasim contrasts the women of Rasht, who do not care too much about religious regulations but are more preoccupied with how they look than people who are originally from other parts of Iran. For a Rashti woman, it might be completely normal to put on full make-up early in the morning, even though she might be elderly, but for people from other cities this kind of behaviour is strange and out of the ordinary.

In this example, the participants begin by speaking about the Gilaks in general and how they are indifferent when it comes to religion. This is immediately repaired by claiming that the people of Rasht tend to be extreme in one way or another, either by abiding by religious rules a lot or not at all. When Nasim gives an example of how a Rashti woman might go dressed even when she has a chador on, she contrasts the woman with her own mother, who is not originally from Rasht. This illustrates what Eckert (1997: 214–15) says in regard to how women tend to compare themselves to each other rather than men. This example also shows how the norms in Rasht differ from those of other cities when it comes to how women dress and appear in public, and what might seem completely normal in Rasht is surprising for women from other places in Iran.

Both of the cases told by Nasim regarding elderly Rashti women who are more aware of their appearance rather than being perceived as religious, are examples of how the national laws of Iran in regard to proper hijab are defied and ignored by Rashti women. A woman showing off cleavage, legs and hair, and wearing a lot of make-up go against the Iranian laws in regard to how a woman should look and behave in the public, and these elderly women are described as typical Rahsti women who are more aware of their looks rather than their religious duties.

The following example is more concerned with the interaction between the people of Rasht and people from other cities, and how the differences between these two groups might influence people from other parts of Iran when they come in contact with the Rashti people.

Example 16. The influence of the Rashti people
The participants in this example are Nasim (N), Shahnaz (Sh), and the researcher (P). The participants have been discussing the differences between people living
in East Gilan (themselves) and those living in West Gilan (Talesh). Here Shahnaz follows this up by talking about the differences between the Rashti people and the rest of the country, and how the people of Rasht influence young people moving to Rasht.

1 Sh: asan man behet (.) alān injā nešastam
I’m telling you (.) I’m sitting here

2 Sh: dāram behet migam (. ) didgāe ādamāye
now and telling you (.) the view of the

3 Sh: rašt bā kolle irān farq mikone yani
Rashtis differs from the rest of Iran meaning

4 Sh: ād- (.) bačehāyi ke az šahrāye dige
cus- (.) when young people from other cities

5 Sh: miyān tuye rašt (.) age ke masan
come to Rasht (.) and even if they

6 Sh: čādorian age masan suratāšun eslāhkarde
wear a chador and don’t thread their faces

7 Sh: nabāše ārāyeši nad[āšte bāšan
and don’t put on make-up

9 N: [nemipasandan
they don’t approve of it

10 Sh: bade ye moddati ke injā zendegi
then after they’ve lived here

11 Sh: mikonan miran vāgean asan didgāhāsun
for some time and leave their way of viewing

12 Sh: farq mikone (.) yani bačehāyi ke az
things truly changes (.) meaning young people

13 Sh: esfehān miyān injā ye bačehāyi
from Esfahan come here are young people

14 Sh: bā s- (.) masan sonnat
with tr- (.) for example traditions

15 Sh: o mazhab o injur čizāan vali injā (.)
and religion and things like that but here (.)

16 Sh: bad ke miyān injā (.) didgāhāsun kolli
then when they come here (.) their views

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23 Threading one’s face means removing facial hair using sewing thread, a method of facial hair removal common in Iran.
Shahnaz starts by contrasting the people of Rasht with the rest of Iran by stating that the view of the Rashtis differs from the rest of Iran (didgāe ādamāye rašt bā kolle irān farq mikone) (l. 2–3), and thus contrasts the Rashiti people with the rest of the country. It is not immediately explained how their views differ; instead she starts talking about young people from other cities coming to live in Rasht. She gives an example on how these young people are in the habit of wearing a chador, and not threading their faces or putting on make-up (l. 6). These outsiders are described as being somewhat indifferent to the way they look. In line 9 Nasim comments on this by saying they don’t approve of it (nemipasandan). It is not entirely clear what it refers to. Most likely, it refers to the young women from other cities not approving of make-up and threading their faces.

In line 10 Shahnaz continues about these outsiders, and claims that after these young people have come to live in Rasht for some time leave their way of viewing things truly changes (vāqean asan didgāhāšun farq mikone) (l. 10–12). While in lines 6–7, Shahnaz spoke about the way the “outsiders” look, from line 10 she speaks about the views of the outsiders. In lines 12–13 she specifically gives young Esfahani people coming to Rasht as an example. These young Esfahani people are described as traditional and religious (l. 14–15), and they have different views that change once they come to Rasht. Here Shahnaz gives an example of her personal experience and encounters with some young women with traditional beliefs and religious views who have come to the NGO (l. 17–20), but whose views have totally shifted as the people in Rasht have a good influence on them.
(l. 22–24). Not only does Shahnaz ascribe the people of Esfahan the (negative) category-bound attributes *traditional* and *religious* (*sonnati* and *mazhabi*) (l. 14–15, 19–20), she also associates being traditional and religious with a lack of interest in one’s appearance, as these young women initially did not apply make-up or thread their faces. These category-bound attributes and activities are seen as negative since Shahnaz later in the example explains that these young Esfahanis who come to Rasht and interact with the Rashti people change over time thanks to the positive influence of the Rashti people. It is at the end of this example when Shahnaz reconnects with her statement in lines 2–3 about the influence of the Rashti people, and describes it in terms of *luckily they have a good influence* (*xo-šbaxtâneam tasire xubi mizāran*) (l. 22–24) that one can see that the effect the Rashtis have is positive, according to her, thus indirectly describing being traditional, religious, and uninterested in one’s looks as negative traits.

By giving first-hand experiences as an example, Shahnaz adds weight to her statements, as she can claim that she has witnessed these changes with her own eyes. As in other examples, the participants make close connections between a person’s level of religiosity and traditional views, and women’s appearance and behaviour, as the “outsiders” who do not put on make-up or thread their faces are also the ones who have traditional and religious views. For further reading about the correlation between how a person dresses and his/her viewpoints on religious, see 4.5.2.

The final example of this section also concerns the interaction between Rashti people and people from other cities, but is of a more confrontational and shocking nature vis-à-vis the Rashti girl portrayed in the example. It also portrays the unwillingness of people from other cities to accept how a young Rashti woman dresses.

Example 17. The man spat at her
This example takes place at Lida’s home, and the participants are Lida (L) and the researcher (P). In this example Lida is asked how she thinks Rasht is different from other cities, and she also discusses her friend’s experience when visiting the city of Yazd.

1 P: *eh be nazare to masan rašt bā šahraaye* uh in your opinion how does Rasht differ

2 P: *digeye irān četori farq mikone:* from other cities in Iran?

3 L: *rašt xeili farhangeš bāztare* the culture of Rasht is much more open it’s
behtare (.) masalan nesbat be šahrāye dige
better (.) for example compared to other cities

širaz nemidunam tabriz (.) farhange
Shiraz I don’t know Tabriz (.) it has a more

bāztari dāre yani hamin ravābete
open culture for example the relationship
doxtarpesar masan em bāztare rāhataran
between girls and boys em it’s more open more

bačehā azādētaran pedarmādārā yā
carefree young people are freer the parents or

(.). masalan (.) em (.). kollan xeili
( .). for example ( .). em ( .). in general lots

čizā (.) man yādāme masalan bazi az
of things ( .). I remember for example some of my

dustā:m ke ( .). masan farz kon yekişun
friends eh ( .). for example imagine one

sanandaj fek konam dars xunde yekişun
studied in Sanandaj I think one

masan tabriz bude ( .). yā ( .). ye seriş-
for example was in Tabriz ( .). or ( .). som-

maslan tabri:z ye xubihāye xāsse
there are for example some good things

xodešo dāšte bāše vali čizi ke bu:d ( .). eh
about Tabriz but the thing was that ( .). uh

ādamāye tuye rašt xeili enetāfpazırtaran
people in Rasht are more flexible in terms

tu zamineye pazireşē farhang ( .). vali unjā
of accepting culture ( .). but there

injury nistan ( .). man yādāme yeki az
they are not like this ( .). I remember one of my

dustām rafte bud em ( .). esmeš sepidast
friends went to em ( .). her name’s Sepideh

rafte bud šam- mosābegeye šamširbāzi
she went to a swor- a sword competition

nemidunam yazd bud esfehān bud kojā
I don’t know was it Yazd was it Esfahan where

bud yazd bud ( .). ba:d migoft man dāşatm
it was it was Yazd ( .). she told me I was
In this example, Lida starts by contrasting the city of Rasht with Shiraz and Tabriz (l. 5), by using positive labelling and describing the culture of Rasht as much more open (xeili bāztare), better (behtare) (l. 3–4), and more open culture (farhange bāztari) (l. 5–6). All of these descriptions are also in the comparative form, as Lida is contrasting the culture of Rasht with the culture of Shiraz and Tabriz. Culture is also used by participants in other examples, especially in the geography chapter, when they contrast the people of Rasht and Gilan with people living in other cities and provinces.

Lida then speaks about the relationship between young men and women in Rasht, which she describes as more open, and young people as more carefree and freer (l. 7–8). When it comes to laws concerning restrictions on relationships between the sexes, they are the same in all of Iran, so what makes Rasht different from the rest of the country in this regard is according to Lida the culture of the city. Lida continues by conceding that there might be good things about Tabriz (l. 13–15), but positions the people of Rasht as different by using yet another positive category-bound attribute as she claims that they are more flexible in terms of accepting culture (xeili enetāfpazirtaran tu zamineye pazireše farhang) (l. 16–17). What makes the people of Rasht unique is not only that their culture is more open
and better to begin with, but also that they are open-minded enough to accept the
culture of others.

In order to illustrate her point, Lida gives an example of a friend of hers who
visited the city of Yazd for a sword competition. As the exemplification is used
to tell the story from the friend’s perspective, most of it consists of active voicing
and is therefore related in the first person. When walking down the street, her
friend was spat on by a stranger on a motorcycle as she did not wear a chador.
The friend was very surprised by this, and could not understand why the person
in question acted the way he did. It then seems as if Lida’s friend was in the com-
pany of someone else, because in lines 26–27 someone explains to her that it was
because of her clothing because you didn’t wear a chador (barāye čador bā in
nazāšte budi). Although Lida’s friend commented that her mānto was neither
short nor revealing, since she was wearing a mānto and not a chador, the person
on the motorcycle found her clothing inappropriate. In lines 30–31 it is indicated
through the shift in pronoun, that it is the motorcyclist’s point of view that is
shown as Lida says as if for example she’s unclean for example in a certain state
(.) as an atonement he spat (masalan in najesse masalan ye hālate (.) kaffāre
mānand). This can be seen as indirect active voicing, indirect since the man in
question did not speak to the friend or explain his actions. Rather this active voic-
ing is used to explain his behaviour, which brings in the social category of reli-
gion.

In the mind of the person on the motorcycle spitting at Lida’s friend for not
wearing more covering clothing was accepted behaviour. A similar situation was
seen in Wowk’s study (1984), where the alleged suspect blamed the victim as
they had not looked and behaved in accordance with how a moral woman should
appear and behave. Here, the person spat at the friend as she was not dressed in
accordance with what he is reported to think as decent and modest clothing. The
same phenomenon can also be seen in West and Fenstermaker (2002: 541) when
they claim that people who break what is considered as gender norms, in this ex-
ample that a woman must be properly covered in public, will be judged and treated
badly.

Returning to what Lida says in lines 16–17 in regard to the people of Rasht
being more flexible in accepting other people’s culture, here she tells a story about
how the Yazdi motorcyclist did not accept what he considered as insufficient hi-
jab. Wearing a mānto is the most common outdoor clothing for young women in
Rasht and it is not frowned upon or perceived as indecent, while chadors are used
mostly by elderly or religious women. In contrast, a chador seems to be the more
appropriate form of hijab in the city of Yazd. The main point in this example is,
however, the contrast between Rasht and Yazd. While Rashti people are described
as willing to accept other people’s culture, the exemplification shows that the same is not the case in Yazd, where Rashki women (who have other customs) are subjected to aggressive behaviour. More about the tolerance of the Rashki people can be read in the following section.

7.4. Rashki women in public

While the previous section concerned appearance, this section deals with how the Rashki identity is manifested through Rashki women’s presence in the public sphere and gatherings. Here, the participants discuss how it is possible for Rashki and Gilaki women to integrate with men without it causing any kind of outrage.

Example 18. Non-gender segregated gatherings

The participants in this example are Fariba (F), Taban (T), Azar (A), and the researcher (P). The participants have been discussing how people in the poorer and richer parts of Rasht live, where they go shopping, and they also mention how the richer people party. They are asked about upper-class parties, and they start discussing how parties differ in Rasht and the surrounding villages in comparison to the rest of the country.

1  P:  eh (.) man ye soāl dāram (.) maslan goftin
      uh (.) I have a question (.) like you mentioned

2  P:  jašn- jašnāye em (.) tabaqeye bālā
      the part- parties em (.) how are upper-class

3  P:  četoriye:
      ones?

3  T:  eh (.) albate bāzam migam ā (.) ra- tuye
      uh (.) as I said before (.) Ra- in

4  T:  (. ) rašt bāzam dāram migam (.) in fāsele
      (. ) Rasht I keep saying (.) there are much

5  T:  xeili kamtare (. ) hattā tu rustāhā ham
      less differences (.) even in the villages the

6  T:  xeili jašnāye xeili unjuri ( . ) tuye
      parties there are really like ( . ) in

7  T:  jašnāsun maxsusān ke miše (. ) eh
      especially when they have parties ( . ) uh

8  T:  hame čiz (. ) xeili kam piš miyād ke bebini
      everything ( . ) you’ll hardly ever see
(. mese jāhāye (. dige jodā konan (. like other (. places that they would

T: o hame [čizo separate and all

F: [man mitunam begam injā: tu in can I answer here in this

kešva:r hamīše in šekli bude ke
country it has always been like this that

F: tu baqīye šahrā (. tu jašnā zanā ye (. in other cities (. at parties women

var nešastan mardā ye var yani kāmelan
and men sit separately so it’s completely

F: jodāst (. yani kāmelan zanune mardune segregated (. meaning men and women are

F: jodāst (. vali tu rašt injuri
completely segregated (. in Rasht it’s not

F: nist (. tu rašt hattā duroftādetarin
like that (. in Rasht even if you go to the

rustāhā ham beri: hālā šāyad beše goft
most remote villages maybe you can even say

gilān hālā na faqat rašt (. kāmelan hame
Gilan and not only Rasht (. everyone sits

F: bā ham nešastan (. momkene masan hālā tu
completely together (. it’s possible that in

F: bālāye ša:hr yeki bā ye
an upper-class area someone will sit in a

pirāhane halqeyi masalan bešine vasate
sleeveless dress for example in the middle of

F: jame mardune (. vali tu rustā hālā
a male gathering (. but well in a village

F: bā mānto rusari mišine vali
(. she will have her coat and headscarf on but

F: bāz un jame bāhamešuno dāran yani
they’ll still keep the mixed group meaning
In this example, the participants are asked to explain how the parties are in upper-class areas as they have discussed parties previously in the conversation and how they differ depending on class. Taban begins by stating that the differences are much less, and then gives the parties and gender-integration as an example in order to illustrate this. Most of this example consists of the participants contrasting the people of Rasht and Gilan from the rest of the country through highlighting the category-bound activity they construe as crucial, namely gender-integrated festivities. Taban states that in parties held in the villages gender segregation hardly ever happens as in other places (l. 4–10). Even though it is not explicitly said, the villages mentioned in this line (and in line 18) refer to villages that are linked to Rasht. Here, she includes the surrounding villages in the traditions of Rasht as she says even in the villages (hattā tu rustāhā) (l. 5), when contrasting Rasht with other places using gender-integrated parties. The reason she says even in the villages, is because villagers are generally known as being more traditional and religious. Including them shows that not only the people of Rasht, but also the villagers of the province are more flexible when it comes to gender-integration.

From line 11, Fariba cuts in and elaborates by explaining that in this country (tu in kešvar) and in the other cities (tu baqiye šahrā), men and women sit in separate sections at parties and are completely segregated, and that it has always been like that (l. 12–16). That it has always been like that, meaning completely segregated, is an extreme-case formulation, used to illustrate how the rest of Iran and other cities contrast with Rasht, as Fariba explains that women and men always sit separately but in Rasht that is not the case. Fariba builds on and upgrades Taban’s statement about the villages being included in the custom of gender-integrated parties, by stating in line 18 that even in the most remote villages men and women sit together at parties. It is not only the villages close to the city, but also the most remote ones that celebrate their festivities in such a manner.

In this example, the participants contrast Rasht and the villages with the rest of the country, and then expand the area by claiming that it is all of Gilan and even the most remote villages of Gilan that differ from the rest of Iran and its people. Here, the Rashti identity is described in terms of openness and willingness to accept gender-integration. That the participants at times both expand and narrow the

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24 This sentence suggests a continuation, but in the conversation Fariba just stops talking. She is not interrupted by any of the other participants; there is just a pause and then the participants start discussing a completely different matter.
geographical area of a Rashti identity can also be seen in the examples of the other chapters. The gender norms of Gilan are described as men and women interacting in gatherings, whereas in the rest of the country the social as well as the gender norms state that men and women should be completely segregated in gatherings and festivities.

In lines 20–23, Fariba returns to the issue of class difference in lines 1–2, when she speaks about the different dress codes for women belonging to the Rasht upper-class areas and those living in the countryside, by saying that among the upper-class in Rasht a woman can be dressed somewhat more revealing, for example in a sleeveless dress, while in the village a woman will make sure to dress more modestly and even wear a headscarf: However, she returns to the subject of gender integration by stating that they’ll still keep the mixed group (vali bāz un jame bāhamešuno dāran) (l. 25), they being the people of the villages. Her final remark shows that even when there are class differences and different dress codes, Gilaks all share gender-integration, and do not forego their local traditions and customs. What separates Gilaks from people in the rest of the country is that they are rather pragmatic in relation to religion and religious rules. In my experience and my findings through participant observation and the natural conversations, gender segregation concerns being religious, which can also be read in chapter 4.

In the following example, the participants discuss the openness of Rasht and how they are treated in Rasht versus other cities when interacting with men.

Example 19. Rashti men have no ulterior motives
This example takes place at Yalda’s home, and the participants are Minoo (M), Yalda (Y), and the researcher (P). The participants have talked about going on vacation the following summer, and have discussed other Iranian cities they have visited. Here they are asked about differences between Rasht and other cities?

1 P: ba:d masan farqaye beyhē șahrēye digeye
so what’s the difference between other Iranian
2 P: irān o rašt chiye:
cities and Rasht?
3 Y: tā unjāi ke man raftam
the places I’ve been to
4 M: injā āzādiye
there is freedom here
5 Y: injā xeili behtare
it’s much better here
In line 1–2 the participants are asked about the differences between Rasht and other cities, to which Minoo replies in line 4 that there is freedom in Rasht. Yalda upgrades Minoo’s answer with a second assessment by saying that *it is much better (xeili behtare)* (l. 5), thus strengthening the effect of Minoo’s reply in the previous line. Minoo repeats Yalda’s answer and continues by saying *we can walk around more comfortably (rāhatar mitunim begardim)* (l. 6–7). She then elaborates by bringing up the relationship between men and women by saying that it is much easier to talk to the men of Rasht since they do not have any ulterior motives (l. 7–9), which she then contrasts with other cities in lines 9–10 by claiming that
this cannot be done in other cities. According to the participants, the people of Rasht are described through the category-bound activity of gender interaction, and that is what contrasts Rashti people with people in other cities. Here, it is Rashti men who are in focus and described as not having any ulterior motives when speaking to women, which also makes walking around in the city more comfortable, as women do not have to be on their guard in regard to men’s motives.

Minoo continues in lines 12–14 by explaining further that if one were to joke around with someone (as she has discussed the interaction between men and women, it is assumed that someone refers to a man), they will be offended and look at you differently (ye jure dige ādamo negā mikonan) (l. 14). In English the word differently does not have a negative or positive meaning, but in an Iranian context ye jure dige has clear negative connotations. To make it clear whether it is in Rasht one is looked at in a negative manner or other cities, she is asked about it, and in line 16 she contrasts Rasht with other cities replies no other places (na jāhāye dige). The way she describes it, the social norms in Rasht differ from other cities through the category-bound activity of gender integration. According to the participants, this is accepted in Rasht but not in other cities, which is the way the participants in the previous example described it. As in example 17. “The man spat at her”, the participant explains that when Rashti women go against what they believe is completely normal behaviour, which is talking and joking with a man, they will be assessed and treated in a negative way. According to the participants, behaviour which is completely normal and natural for Rashti men and women, and part of how they relate to and interact with each other, is looked down and frowned upon by people in other cities.

Minoo is once more asked about the reasons for the differences, and in lines 18–19 the factor of culture is brought up, as it has been in other examples when the participants contrast Rashti people with people from other places. Minoo states it’s their lower level of culture (farhange pāyintarešune). Here having a lower level of culture goes back to men in other cities being offended if a woman were to talk and joke with them a lot, and thus look down at her.

In the final example of this section, the participants discuss yet another aspect of women and public spaces, namely the freedom of Rashti women to frequent public spaces without male company in the evening and after dark.

Example 20. Women staying outside in the evening
In this example, the participants are Roya (R) and the researcher (P), and the participant speaks about the differences between Rasht and other cities. Previous to this example, Roya has discussed how life for women in Iran is restricted by the
national laws, and here she is asked to give examples of how her life differs from the life of her brother.

1. P: mituni masan tōzi bedi ke tu (.) masan can you explain how in for example (.) for

2. P: fek kon masan tu ye ruz tuye ye hafte (.) example imagine one day in one week (.)

3. P: tuye ye (.) zendegiye to tuye jāmee bā in one (.) how does your life in society differ

4. P: barādarect četori farq mikone: (.) če from that of your brother (.) what

5. P: kārāyi to mituni bokoni yā če kārāyi ke to things can you do or what

6. P: nemituni bokoni ke barādaret mitune things can’t you do that your brother

7. P: bokone: can do?

8. R: xob masan sātāye raft o āmade (.) well for example the times of going out (.)

9. R: doxtarhā o pesarhā farq albate ziyād tuye differ for boys and girls but not so much in

10. R: rašt na vali masan šomā ye šahre kučiki Rasht for example if you were to go to a small

11. R: mese (.) gorgān gombad berin xā masan city like (.) Gorgan or Gombad well for example

12. R: zanā aslan az sāate hafte šab be bad women basically a woman after seven pm seeing

13. R: didane ye zan be xosus ye zane tanhā asan a woman and especially a woman alone in the

14. R: ye čize vahšatnākiye tuye xiyābun streets is a horrible thing

15. R: dar surati ke xob mardhā dar har sāati az but well men can stay outside at any of the

16. R: šabāneruz mitunan birun bemunan (.) bad twenty-four hours of the day (.) then

17. R: dige (.) ye seri az masāele farhangi there (.) there are some cultural matters
18 R: masalan (.) masan in bahsāyi ke
for example (.) for example these discussions

19 R: nemidunam miduni yā na (.)
I don’t know if you know about them or not (.)

20 R: masan xeili az qabilehā han- qo:māye irāni
for example many tribes sti- Iranian clans

21 R: hanuz doxtarāro qabl az ezdevāj mibaran
still take the girls to medical examiners

22 R: pezeške qānuni barāye ček kardan ke inā
before marriage in order to check if they

23 R: bākere hastan nistan
are still virgins or not

Here, Roya is asked to explain the differences between her and her brother’s lives. She answers by saying that the times for staying out differ for boys and girls. She then repairs her claim by saying but not so much in Rasht (albate ziyād tuye rašt na) (l. 9–10). She continues on the topic of differences between Rasht and other cities, by saying that if one were to visit a small city (with Gorgan and Gombad given as examples), seeing a woman alone in the streets after seven in the evening is a horrible thing (čize vahšatnākiye) (l. 14). Roya also brings up the category of gender as she contrasts women with men, by saying that men stay out regardless what time of the day. A similar statement is made by Samira in example 21. “Their men give them certain liberties” when she discusses how girls in Rasht are allowed to stay out until 10 p.m., whereas girls in other cities do not have the same kind of freedom. In this example, Roya first speaks about the norms of the entire country, and not only about Rasht, by saying that the times for girls and boys differ. However, as she continues, she speaks about what can be seen as accepted social norms in regard to women’s behaviour in Rasht contrasted with social norms for women in other cities. What contrasts the Rashti women with women in other parts of the country is that the Rashti women are more equal to men. Here this is illustrated by the fact that girls in Rasht are allowed to stay out longer than women in other places. It is also interesting that it is Rashti girls who are contrasted with women in Gorgan and Gombad, since women as adults should be freer to decide on their whereabouts, whereas girls are usually controlled by their parents.

As in other examples, the cultural factor is brought up when Roya claims that there are also cultural matters that distinguish Rasht from other places. She does not explicitly speak about Rasht in lines 19–23, but since neither Rasht (nor any other part of Gilan) are tribal communities, one can conclude that the people of
Rasht are not included in her statements. After she has spoken about cultural matters, she gives an example of how it is manifested in people’s lives. According to Roya, *many tribes sti- Iranian clans still take the girls to medical examiners before marriage in order to check if they are still virgins or not* (xeili az qabilehā han- qomāye irāni hanuz doxtarāro qabl az ezdevāj mibaran pezeške qānuni barāye ček kardan ke inā bākere hastan nistan) (l. 20–23). As the virginity of a bride is still important for many Iranian men, (and their families), it is also important for the family of the bride to make sure she is a virgin on her wedding night, in order to avoid shame and disgrace. Here, Roya explicitly points out Iranian tribes and clans as people who are very concerned about the virginity of their daughters, and she contrasts them with the people of Rasht when it comes to cultural matters. A parallel view can be seen in example 21. “their men give them certain liberties”, where the participants discuss how Rashti men are perceived as not controlling their girls and women, and letting them have some liberties that men in other cities find odd. The role of men in regard to women’s rights to dress and act as they wish becomes evident in the following section.

7.5. Rashti men’s role in the freedom of Rashti women

The third, and final, aspect of what constitutes a Rashti identity in regard to gender and gender relations, the role of Rashti men, is discussed and exemplified below. In this section, their role becomes prominent as the participants discuss how they are treated when they are in other cities, and how people in these cities blame greater freedom and the less covering clothing of Rashti girls and women on Rashti men.

Example 21. Their men give them certain liberties

The participants in this conversation are the participants Kamand (K) and her friend Samira (S), Kamand’s mother Mrs Saberi (MS), and the researcher (P). Here the participants discuss and compare Rasht and other Iranian cities, such as Esfahan, Bojnord and Mashhad. What is being discussed is how much better Rasht is, and Samira talks about her sister who was very poorly treated as a student in Mashhad when people found out she was from Rasht.

1. P: fek mikonin ke rašt bā šahrāye
   do you think that Rasht compared to

2. P: digeye irā- other cities in Ira-
ک: اوه آه، بهتر است

س: [خیلی بهتر (خنده)]

ک: [خیلی بهتر] (خنده) راشت بسیار بهتر است

ک: بهت- یانی امیدوارم فقط در ایران ممکن است راشت

ک: او تهران امیدوارم آنها خوب هستند

س: [بله (خنده)] [و اصفهان]

ک: [حتی من اصفهان را نمی‌پذیرم]

م: [چه بهتر است]

ک: در هر حال (خنده)

ک: مخسوسان اصفهان برسی (خنده)

ک: اگر به اصفهان بروید (خنده)

ک: افراد عالی و غربی هستند و همچنین

س: (خنده)

ک: همچنین در ایران [خیر (خنده)]

ک: چشم‌مرانه

س: [گذاردن دختر دختران را می‌پذیرند]

س: [بنابراین تا ده ساعت قبل از یک‌بشنام]

س: [اما در این شهرها]

س: [بله]

س: [حتما نیست]

(.).
س: "ازادی‌شون" 
"their liberties" 

ک: بی‌پیش اینست که من بستم یک بار تو 
and then (. ) me and my friend were on 

ک: اتوبوس ماشهد بودم یک مرد داشت (.) 
the bus to Mashhad once and this man was (.) 

ک: بچه‌های متروک می‌خوریم (.) (giggle) 
{eating} us up with his eyes (giggle) 

س: ماشهد "حالا مام" (nervous giggle) 
Mashhad "now your mother" (nervous giggle) 

ک: [یا (.) نا بابا مامانه 
yes (.) oh no my mom is 

ک: من بوئنوردیه 
from Bojnord 

س: (laughing) 

ک: 

س: [یا (.) خاهمه 
yes (.) my sister 

س: من دانشجو بودند بندی که ماشهد اسانونا 
was a student close to Mashhad and when they 

س: گوشی می‌شدان اسان خاهمه مان راشتی‌های 
heard that my sister was from Rasht they would 

س: همیشه چیزی اسان (. ) می‌گفت خاهمه 
in a way (. ) basically (. ) my sister would say 

س: ( . ) میگفت م- سراهتا بی‌مان 
(.) she would say they would wo- tell me to my 

س: میگفتان (. ) مان راشتی‌های راشتی‌های 
face (. ) you’re from Rasht people from Rasht 

س: یژوریان [نهمیدونم 
are peculiar I don’t know 

ک: [راشت خلیل خوب (giggle) 
Rasht is very good (giggles) 

س: مردان یژوریان (. ) به- بی‌خودی 
their men are peculiar (. ) the- they 

س: ازادی‌هایی می‌دانم 
give them certain freedoms
This example starts with the participants being asked how they believe Rasht is compared to other cities in Iran. In line 3 Kamand claims that it is much better in Rasht, and her statement is upgraded by Samira in line 4 who says *it’s much better* (*xeili behtare*) and laughs. The quick uptake shows Samira’s understanding of Kamand’s statement, but also strengthens the statement that Rasht is better. Samira also stresses the word *much* in order to emphasize her claim. This is repeated in line 5 by Kamand who says *it’s much better (laughing)* *Rasht is much better* (*xeili behtare (laughing) rašt xeili: beht-*), also stressing the word *much* the second time in order to emphasize the superiority of Rasht compared to other parts of Iran. As in many of the other examples, the words used to describe Rasht have a positive ring to them, and that itself is enough when contrasting Rasht with the rest of the country. Kamand continues in lines 5–8 and positions Tehran and Rasht together, when she states that these two cities might be the only good cities in Iran.

In line 8 Samira adds Esfahan to the cities that can be seen as good. In the following line Kamand objects to this by saying that she does not approve of Esfahan. The question in line 10 *in which way is it good* (*az če lahāz xube:* ) is directed to Samira, but it is Kamand who answers the question by saying *in every way* (*az hame lahāz*) (l. 11), and then goes on to state the ways in which she thinks Esfahan is not good, contrasting Esfahan with Rasht. She brings up culture, a recurring topic when the participants wish to point out the differences between Rasht and other cities, and then adds that the people of Esfahan are very greedy (l. 13). In line 14, Samira giggles in response to Kamand’s claims, but she neither agrees nor disagrees. It is rather a sign that the category-bound attribute used to describe the Esfahani, *greedy* (*xasis*), is amusing and perhaps even a bit embarrassing. The reason Kamand describes the people of Esfahan as greedy is because in Iran the people of Esfahan are believed to be very greedy and many jokes are made about the greedy Esfahani people. By using the word greedy, Kamand is repeating the stereotypical image of an Esfahani person.

In lines 15–25, Kamand and Samira bring up two reasons why Rasht is different from the rest of the country, both reasons concerning gender. First, Kamand uses category-bound attributes once more as she claims that girls in Iran cannot feel comfortable in the public space as *in all of Iran sorry* (giggles) *they’re always checking out girls* (*hamejāye irān {bebaxši (giggle) češmčerunan}* ) (l. 15–16). In Persian *češmčerun budan* (check someone out), is mostly associated with men, and is a highly negative way of describing a man’s behaviour. It refers to someone who is in the habit of staring quite openly at all the women around him. This statement also deals with gender roles in Iran, as Kamand describes men as almost harassing girls, and where the girls are victimized. As *all of Iran* includes Rasht,
Kamand continues by saying that it is at least possible for girls in Rasht to stay out until 10 p.m., thus contrasting Rasht with other places. Samira upgrades Kamand’s claims by speaking about the presence of females in the public space, and says but in those cities (tu un šahrā) (l. 18), there is not even that there’s not even that (haminam nist haminam nist) (l. 20).

In line 22 Samira murmurs a comment about the issue of girls’ liberties, which can be seen as an increment to hers and Kamand’s previous comments about how girls in Rasht can stay out later compared to girls in other cities. In line 23 Kamand returns to her claim about girls always being checked out, by giving an example of her own experience on a bus to Mashhad. The exemplification is used to legitimize her statement about girls being stared at and harassed in other places. According to Kamand, she encountered a man on the bus who kept staring at her and her friend as if he was about to eat them up with his eyes. In line 26, Samira giggles nervously and quietly says Mashhad now your mother (mašhad hālā māmānetam) as she believes Kamand’s mother to be originally from Mashhad. She is corrected by Kamand who says that her mother is from Bojnord, a city that is also situated in north-eastern Iran, which is in the same region as the city of Mashhad. Once the origin of Kamand’s mother is clarified, both girls laugh and Kamand then continues in line 30 by saying yes (.) the men (.) I mean (āre (.) mardāro man (.) migam), as if to clarify that it is the men, and not the women, of Mashhad (and other cities) who stare at girls and make them feel uncomfortable in public places.

Assured that she will not insult Kamand’s mother, who is also present during this conversation, Samira gives an example of her older sister’s experience as a Rashti girl during her time as a student in a place close to Mashhad (l. 31–40). This example is used to show that Rashti girls are treated poorly, when they visit other cities in Iran. Similar stories can be seen in example 17. “the man spat at her”, where Lida’s friend was spat at when she visited Yazd, and the following example “Studying in Astara”, where Nasim shares her experiences about her time as a student in the city of Astara. Here Samira goes on to talk about when they heard that her sister was from Rasht, and then uses active voicing in order to illustrate her sister’s experiences. Active voicing is used here to strengthen Samira’s claims that Rashti girls are frowned upon and looked down on in other places. The active voicing can be seen in lines 36–37 and 39–40 as Samira explains how her sister was talked to by saying you’re from Rasht people from Rasht are peculiar (to rašti hasti raštihā injurian), and their men are peculiar (.) they give them certain freedoms (mardāšun injuria:n (.) beh- behešun ye āzādihāyi midan). It is not explained right away what these people meant when they claimed that people from Rasht are in a certain way. This comes in line 39.
when it becomes clear that it is connected to Rashti men being peculiar as they give their women certain freedoms. Here it is not only Rashti girls who are contrasted with girls in other places, it is the open-mindedness of Rashti men who are willing to give their women certain freedoms, which is also contrasted with men from other places, here the men from Mashhad. The category-bound attributes used here to describe Rashti men and women are quite negative, but it should be kept in mind that it is the people of Mashhad that are “speaking”. Apart from contrasting Rashti men with men in other parts of Iran, this utterance also serves to highlight the gender norms the people of Mashhad supposedly abide by, namely that it is a man’s responsibility to control women and restrict their freedom, while a woman’s is to be subordinate and obedient. This concerns what West and Fenstermaker (2002: 541) claim about the awareness of members in the two gender groups that they should behave in accordance with the cultural norms regarding gender. In this example, it is especially the Rashti men who do not live up to the cultural conceptions of masculinity, and are consequently the target of “gender assessment”.

Apart from the concept of gender and how one should behave in accordance with the normative rules, this example also contrasts Rashtis with the people of Mashhad in regard to showing tolerance. The people of Mashhad are depicted as intolerant as they speak in derogatory ways about Rashti men and women. A similar situation is described in the following example, where Nasim narrates her personal experiences as a Rashti female student in the city of Astara.

Example 22. Studying in Astara
The people present for this conversation are Nasim (N), Shahnaz (Sh), and the researcher (P). Previous to this example, the participants have been discussing how the culture of western Gilan differs from the eastern part, also known as Talesh. Shahnaz gives her friend, who is married to a Taleshi man, as an example of how much the culture of these two people differs. The topic of differences between people living in the Gilan province is continued in this example as Nasim gives an example of her time as a student in Astara, a city in the Talesh part of Gilan that borders the country Azerbaijan, and is known to have a mainly Azeri Turkish population.

1 N: ke xob vāqean man xodamam dānešju budam but well I myself was a student
2 N: tuye tâleš man āstārā budam āstārāyiā in Talesh I was in Astara in Astara
3 N: torkan they are Turks

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I know

but not the Turks from Azerbaijan they

are you know Turks of Gilan or they

see themselves like this they would say

to us the girls from Rasht are in a bad state

I’m serious they are truly like this

they give us as an example since I was a
twenty-two-year-old girl my face would be fix

I would thread my face and pluck my

eye-brows I’d wear make-up (. ) but well I’d

pluck my eye-brows in the girlish style I

that I am an unmarried girl

wouldn’t you know all that much with the guys

but they would say very solemnly in some of

the classes where there were a lot of guys with

us who were our classmates they’d say they’d

say these Rashti girls are like this once

they’re away from their dads they come here
As Shahnaz has spoken about the differences between Talesh and eastern Gilan prior to this example, Nasim says that she herself studied in Talesh, in the city of Astara (l. 1–3). She then points out that the people of Astara are Turks. It is not the first time the participants have brought up the Turks as an ethnic group in contrast to the Rashtis. However, in lines 5–7 she does not contrast the Turks of Astara with Rashtis. Instead she states that they consider themselves as the Turks of Gilan and not Turks from Azerbaijan, somehow associating the population of Astara with the rest of the province. In line 8, there is however a shift as Nasim uses active voicing to illustrate her encounter with the people of Astara. According to Nasim the Turks would say the girls from Rasht are in a bad state (doxtarāye raštī vazešun bade) (l. 8). The active voicing shows from whose perspective this is negatively charged, and that the very negative category-bound attribute is associated with Rashti girls. In Persian the words vazešun bade (they are in a bad state) have clear negative sexual undertones, used about someone who is sexually depraved. In Iran where modesty and purity, especially that of young girls, is very important, speaking about someone in this manner is highly insulting. The graveness of the insult can also be seen as she says I’m serious they’re truly like this (jeddi migam vāqean intori hastan) (l. 9), assuring the other participants in the discussion that she is not making things up. She then adds that the Turks would even give Rashti girls as an example of depravity.

That the comment was highly offensive can also be seen in lines 10–16 as Nasim takes a defensive stance and explains how she would look and behave as a single woman. Nasim explains that she was a twenty-two-year-old girl (doxtāre bistodo sale) (l. 11–12) at that time. The word doxtar is important here as it indicates that a woman is still a virgin regardless of her age. Nasim also mentions this in lines 13–16, when she speaks about how she would pluck her eye-brows in a girlish style, and that she was a single girl, which Nasim explains as meaning that she knew her limits. She continues by saying that she was aware of her status as unmarried and briefly mentions her relation to the opposite sex. She does not explicitly say that she did not associate much with young men. Instead she says
wouldn’t you know all that much with the guys (bā pesarā ziyād masalan či) (l. 16). It is interesting that there is no verb when she speaks about her relationship to the opposite sex; instead there is only a hedge. The reason is most likely that since relationships between men and women are stigmatized in Iran, Nasim uses a hedge in order not to specify what she is talking about. All of this shows how Nasim resists the categorisation of Rashti girls being sexually depraved. Nasim shows that regardless of how Rashti girls were spoken to and about, she herself knew her limits and would behave and look accordingly.

In line 17 Nasim starts speaking about her male classmates, and how they would speak to her. They would be very frank and open, and not try to hide their opinions or be polite about it. Once more Nasim uses active voicing in lines 20–22 as she quotes the male classmates as saying these Rashti girls are like this once they’re away from their dads they come here they put on lots of make-up and stuff (in doxtarāye rašti in torian dur az češe bābāhāšun miyān injā ziyād ārāyeš mikonan felān inā). Active voicing is once more used here to show that Rashti girls would be spoken to and about in a negative manner. It is also used to contrast the Turks of Astara from Rashtis. The fathers of Rashti girls are mentioned as it is fathers who are supposed to control their daughters and how they behave and look. According to Nasim’s Turkish classmates, Rashti girls feel free to behave however they wish when they are away from their home city and out of reach of their fathers’ control. This is an interesting aspect of both gender stereotypes as well as family relations. Girls and women are to be controlled by men, and as long as a girl is unmarried it is the father as head of the family who is in charge of her appearance.

In the final four lines of this example, Nasim contrasts Turkish men with Rashti men as she speaks about how she and other Rashti girls are and look when they are in Rasht. She does not directly mention Rashti men, but what she says can be seen as an objection to what her Turkish class-mates would say about her and Rashti fathers. According to Nasim, once she and other Rashti girls are in Rasht, and consequently under the supervision of their fathers, contrary to what their classmates might think, young Rashti women are actually free to dress in shorter māntos and prettier shawls. In other words, Rashti men let their daughters be freer and dress more prettily than Turkish men approve of, and Rashti women do not dress inappropriately when away from male supervision. On the contrary, they dress down, and as Nasim was keen on pointing out in lines 10–16, they are fully aware of their limits and dress and behave accordingly. This reflects the descriptions of Iranian society as based on class, tradition and patriarchy, which can be seen in 4.5.1. The public sphere in Iran. According to Price (2001), the patriarchal
culture of Iran gives men more rights than women, and there are rules and regulations to abide by. These rules have been strengthened after the Revolution of 1979, and Khosravi (2008: 31) states that the post-revolutionary social order is based on Islamic family rules, where the father’s obligation is to guard the family. This also brings to mind similar ways of thinking to those in the previous example. There the people of Mashhad believed Rashti men to be wanting in their obligations as men, and that they did not live up to the cultural norms of how a man should act towards women, i.e. controlling and restricting them. In this example, the men of Astara state that Rashti girls escape their fathers’ control when they live in other cities, but it is Nasim who shatters that image as she claims that in Rasht it is quite the opposite, and that Rashti girls and women enjoy greater freedom in regard to how they dress and look. This also results in Rashti girls being treated badly by non-Rashitis, as has been illustrated in examples 17, 21, and 22, when encountering with men from other cities. According to Rashti girls and women, they are behaving in accordance with normal gender roles. The problem then occurs when Rashti girls and women come in contact with people who have different views on how girls and women are to dress and behave, which results in a clash the Rashti girls and women perceive as surprising, offensive, and strange.

A final conclusion can be drawn from this example, which is the same as in example 17. “He spat on me”. In both examples, Rashti girls are described as knowing their limits, and not dressing or looking provocative. On the contrary, they respect the rules regarding female clothing and modesty, and might even cover up more when visiting other Iranian cities. Nevertheless, they are perceived as either not being religious enough or sexually depraved, and in both examples they are treated and spoken to in ways they see as shocking, either being spat on or accused of being sexually corrupt.

7.6. Concluding discussions

The social category of gender has already been discussed in chapters 5 and 6. There are two differences between chapters 5 and 6–7 when it comes to how the participants have discussed the social category of gender. First, gender was used by the participants in chapter 5 to discuss the relationship between language usage and gender, with the focus on the differences between young men and women’s opinions regarding speaking Gilaki and Rashti, or Persian with an accent. The second difference is that in chapter 5, the social category of gender was used to illustrate the differences between men and women, while in chapters 6–7 it is used
to highlight the differences between Gilaki/Rashti men and women in contrast with men and women living in the rest of Iran.

Along with the previous two chapters, the social category of gender in this chapter shows why and how the participants consider the people of Rasht/Gilan to be unique and can be contrasted with people living in other Iranian cities and provinces. When discussing their Rashti identity and contrasting themselves with people in the rest of the country, the participants have used numerous discursive means, such as category-bound activities and attributes, active voicing, contrasting, exemplification, and extreme-case formulations.

As already mentioned, the focal point of this chapter is on how Rashti women and men are described and defined by the participants. It is these descriptions and definitions that set both Rashti women as well as Rashti men apart from the men and women living in the rest of the country. Four aspects of gender are illuminated by the participants: the significance of appearance in Gilan and Rasht, the parallels drawn between clothing and/or behaviour and religion, Rashti women’s interaction with men and their presence in public places, and finally Rashti men’s role when it comes to Rashti women being able to dress more freely than women in other places.

In section 7.2, gender is construed as something that one does and not something one has (Garfinkel 1967, West and Zimmerman 1978, Kessler and McKenna 1978). Butler (1990b: 278) describes gender as a performative act, and according to Stokoe and Smithson (2001: 224) gender is formed through the repetition of actions.

Taking an intersectional approach into account, the social category of religion is brought up over and over again in this chapter. According to the participants, religion is closely linked to their identity as Rashtis and Gilaks, and the social category they bring up repeatedly in the examples. The participants do not argue that the people of Rasht have another religious affiliation than the rest of the country; indeed, all of the participants are Muslims, whether or not they practice their religion. What sets them apart from the rest of the country is the Gilaki/Rashti people’s approach to their religion and degree of religiosity contrasted with the approach and degree of religiosity of the rest of the country. In this thesis the participants link the degree of religiosity to contrast the gender role and norms of Rashti women with those of Iranian women living in the rest of the country. In Rasht, the norms enable women to be freer and more comfortable, to care about their style and looks even when it contradicts religious regulations, to interact and integrate with the opposite sex, and to have greater control of their whereabouts and their time when it comes to their presence in public spheres. This is contrasted with the gender norms in the rest of the country which state that women are to be
controlled by men, care less about their appearance and more about religious values in regard to clothing and covering up, not be present in public places in the evening, and keep completely segregated from the opposite sex.

As was argued by Eckert (1997: 213–215), gender is a social construction which can intersect with other social phenomena, and therefore gender roles should be perceived as social practice. This also entails men and women to evaluate their roles, not just vis-à-vis each other, but also within their groups. This can be seen in this chapter as Rashti women contrast themselves primarily with women in other parts of the country and not with Rashti men in the construction of their identity as Rashti women. Similarly they contrast Rashti men with other Iranian men in their discussions. Where Rashti men are described as not having ulterior motives when speaking and joking with women, or allowing women to dress more freely and in less revealing outfits, being offended when women talk and joke with them, or punishing women, physically and verbally, and believing they disregard the hijab regulations.

The reasons why these differences exist between Rasht/Gilan and other places are construed as Rashti people in general being more flexible in their ability to accept other people and their cultures, but also to be more pragmatic and even indifferent when it comes to religious rules and regulations. This has resulted in them being more carefree and comfortable in their relationships with the opposite sex, and being more aware of appearance and clothing. People from other places are on the other hand described as having religious beliefs and traditional views, which are reflected in their lack of interest in how they look, having a lower level of culture, controlling their women’s appearance, whereabouts, and even highly personal matters such as virginity.

People from other places are also rigid in their beliefs in such way that they are rude and hostile towards those who are different. This rigidness and intolerance becomes apparent in several of the examples when the participants describe and discuss clashes that emerge when the people of Rasht and people from other cities encounter each other, either in events they have experienced themselves, or in situations they have been told about by close relatives, which the participants then use to legitimise their negative views of people living in other Iranian cities. When discussing these events, whether the participants have experienced the events themselves or not, the participants draw attention to the gender norms existing in Iranian society, and especially those concerning what is expected of an Iranian man. As the participants describe it, Rashti men are frowned upon and valued in negative terms by men living in other cities.

The reason given is that there is a notion of how a man should behave, and that it is the obligation of male relatives to control “their” girls and women, both in
regard to how they dress and how they behave. This also affects the way in which Rashti girls are treated and talked to when visiting other cities. As Rashti women are described by the participants as being very keen on their appearance, and possibly even being more open in their relations with men, they are spoken to in derogatory ways, perceived as sexually depraved, and even chastised by strangers. This issue is discussed by Speer and Stokoe (2011: 45) and West and Fenstermaker (2002: 541) as they speak about the expectations of men and women that they behave in a certain way in society, and how they are judged negatively when going against the norms and regulations expected of men and women.
8. Discussions and conclusions

8.1. Introduction
The core of this study concerns how young Rashti women constitute their unique identity as Rashtis through their talk and interaction, and how they relate to the concept of Rashti, either as a dialect, a person belonging to a geographical area, or a notion of collective characteristics. By doing this, they show that there are multiple layers of social categories linked to different category-bound attributes and activities, which the participants invoke with the help of various discursive means when talking about their identities as Rashti women.

The purpose of this chapter is to revisit the questions in chapter 1, and provide a summarising discussion of the result chapters (5–7). The participants of this study speak about *farhang* ‘culture’, and it appear to be a very important part of their lives, as well as a way for them to contrast themselves with others. Even though culture is not generally treated as a social category, it should not be neglected and left out of the analysis. This is why the following section, 8.2. concerns how the participants speak about the unique culture of Gilan and Rasht, as they contrast it with the culture of the rest of Iran. Section 8.3. concerns how the participants have used different discursive means when categorising themselves and others and contrasting themselves with other groups in Iranian society. As intersectionality has been an important approach in this study, the final section, 8.4., will focus on how the participants construct their identities as Rashtis through the intersection of different social categories.

8.2. The culture of Rasht and Gilan contrasted with the rest of Iran
In chapters 5–7, culture has been an important factor when the participants discussed and described the differences between the people of Rasht and people in other parts of the country. Sometimes, culture was described in terms of books, fashion, and ideas, in other places it regarded stories told to children, music and melodies, which are described as peaceful and joyous. At other times culture is described in terms of the relationships and interaction between Rasht/Gilaki men
and women, in that the people of the province are said to have more comfortable and carefree ways of interacting, or in that festivities and gatherings are always gender integrated. In the rest of the country, on the other hand, people make sure that gatherings are kept completely gender segregated, and men and women interacting is frowned upon.

People are referred to as bi-farhang, meaning that they are uncultured, or bā-farhang, being the opposite and meaning that they are cultured. Farhang is a quite complex notions, and might at times intersect with belonging to the middle- or upper-classes, but one can also be rich and belong to the upper-class and simultaneously lack sophistication and be uncultured. There are, for example, those who belong to the bazar class or the nouveau riche and therefore possess extreme wealth, but who are often also religious and traditional, which – as can be read in this study – equals being uncultured. In some parts of the staged conversations, the participants also spoke about very wealthy girls they know of who are described as very bi-farhang, since all they care about is how they look. These young women were described as wearing very tight and short clothes, way too much make-up, and constantly parading the streets of Golsar in order to gain attention and try to find boyfriends.

In many of the examples, the participants use culture to contrast themselves and the Rashtis with the rest of the country. The people of Rasht are then described as more accepting of other people’s cultures, whereas people in the rest of the country are perceived and described as more rigid and intolerant. In several of the examples, the participants describe how they or other Rashti women they know were treated in negative ways, spat at, talked down to, or described as loose women, when going to other cities. This was despite the fact that they made sure to appear and behave decently. It is, however, not only Rashti women who are spoken to and of in derogatory ways, as Rashti men are perceived as peculiar and weird in that they are conceived as not controlling their women and giving them too many liberties.

The factors underlying these differences between Rasht/Gilan and other cities and provinces are construed as being rooted in the geography (and in part) the history of the province. According to the participants, the Alborz Mountains have provided protection from invasions and influence from the south, mainly from the Arabs, but also from the rest of the country, which the participants contrast themselves with. Simultaneously the Caspian Sea has functioned as a bridge of communication to the north and enabled fashion, ideas, books and foreign influence to enter.

Communication with Europeans and Russians has also influenced the culture of the province to make it more peaceful and better. In many of the examples, the
participants contrast themselves with people living in other cities and provinces, attacking foreign forces such as the Arabs, or with people who live in desert or mountain areas, or in tribes. When it comes to Europeans and Russians, the participants associate themselves with these groups, whom they describe as having had a very good impact on the province and its people. The good northern influence has come through the import of culture, but also through Russians and Europeans having lived among the Gilaks, and possibly even having had relations with them. It was even suggested that the latter may in turn have resulted in offspring, meaning that the people living in the region today might actually have some European and Russian ancestry.

8.3. Discursive means
In the staged conversations the participants highlight and discuss various social categories, which together constitute a Rashti/Gilaki identity. The participants use different resources and discursive means when discussing and constituting their identities in the interactions. These resources and devices are categorisation according to various social categories, category-bound attributes and activities, contrasting, extreme-case formulations, active voicing, and code-switching.

When it comes to social identity, people place themselves and others in “in-groups” and “out-groups” through a process of social comparison. People are categorised and placed in the “in-group” based on similarities and features they perceive as positive, and in “out-groups” based on differences and characteristics they consider to be negative. An individual’s self-image and identity is formed through self-categorisation, where one looks at oneself as an object and classifies and categorises oneself in relation to social categories. By using categorisation, conversational participants use the generic us and them to associate or contrast themselves with others in interaction. This is always done against the context of a field, and what becomes important is then the relationship between different categories in the field (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 242). Categories are created with the help of specific linguistic means, where associations between categories and specific activities and attributes, so-called category-bound activities and category-bound attributes, are used in the construction of identities.

Category-bound attributes and activities are used in an MCA approach, and it is argued that each category is linked to certain activities or attributes, so-called category-bound activities and attributes, helping individuals to understand the actions of other people. In this study, category-bound attributes and activities are used by the participants when they orient towards being Rashti in their talk. At
the same time, they contrast themselves with other groups by associating them with different sets of attributes and activities. By speaking about and describing the attributes and activities associated to a Rashti person as well as the “other”, the participants generalise and (re)create stereotypes. When, for example, all Rashtis are described in terms of positive category-bound attributes and activities, such as open-minded, more accepting of others, less controlling, peaceful and joyous, and more aware of their appearance, the “others” are conversely linked to negative ones, for example traditional, religious, less open-minded, less keen on how they look, and rude. The category-bound activities and attributes also contribute to a sense of community between the participants and reinforce their identities as Rashtis.

Several discursive means are used in the staged conversations when the participants contrast themselves with other groups in society, or when they strengthen the claims they have made about a category. One of these discursive means is extreme-case formulations (ECFs), where speakers make complaints, accusations, justifications, and defend themselves. ECFs are an effective way of showing that claims are true. ECFs are used in the staged conversations mainly to justify the participants’ claims as to why Rashtis and Gilaks are better than the people they contrast themselves with, as well as to minimize and maximize the contrasts between the different categories.

Active voicing is another discursive means, used by the participants to show how a person would speak, sometimes in a hypothetical situation, but in most cases it was used to tell an anecdote. It is also used when the participants quote an absent third party, when they wish to strengthen their statements and claims, for example when they speak about how they were spoken to in their interaction with people from other cities, or when quoting a person who has first-hand experience of life in other cities of Iran.

Code-switching is mainly treated in the examples presented in chapter 5 in two different ways when the participants interject words and phrases in Gilaki or Rashti. Code-switching is used by the participants when they quote how a Rashti person speaks, especially when the participants have spoken in a derogatory manner about the Rashti dialect or Gilaki language, functions then as strengthening a statement. The second usage of code-switching is when the participants joke around. When asked if and when they use Rashti, the participants answer that they usually use it to joke around, and then show it by interjecting words and expressions in Rashti.

In many of the conversations, the participants used exemplification as a means to make their point. They would either give examples of events they themselves had witnessed, for example how some people speak, or events that they had heard
about through friends or relatives, such as how Rashti girls are treated when they visit other cities, or the lives of women in other regions. By giving specific examples, the speaker aims to present information, persuade, explain, define, or illustrate. Good examples also add mental imagery, evidence, and support to the speaker’s main claims, and are meant to ensure that the speaker’s meaning and ideas are made known and understood.

In the staged conversations it becomes apparent that categorisation, as well as other discursive means, are useful resources in the constitution of identities, and a way for the participants to interpret and explain their surrounding world and reality.

8.4. Intersectionality and the interplay of the social categories

In order to describe how different categories influence one another, an intersectional approach has proven fruitful. In the construction of their Rashti identity the participants show how the social categories of gender, age, religion, and class interact and overlap. However, rather than seeing the above mentioned social categories as independent of each other, it is the interplay between them that is interesting, as they influence one another, and are changeable depending on the context of the conversation.

8.4.1. The Rashti identity in relation to social categories

Gender norms and gender roles are very central to the study, as these young women over and over again describe themselves as much freer and less controlled than women in other parts of the country. Gender is made relevant when the participants discuss how the local traditions surpass both national (religious) laws and social codes in other places. Rashti women and girls are allowed to dress in less covering clothing, even though of course the regulations regarding hijab and covering one’s hair are national ones. They are also allowed to frequent public places in the evenings and at night. In another example gender integration is brought up as affecting relations between young men and women, since Rasht is more open and more carefree compared to the rest of the country.

In many of the examples, the identity of the participants as young Rashti women is constructed in the intersection of the social categories of gender and religion. Above, it has been stated that the social category of gender is used to contrast Rashti women and men with women and men from the rest of the country, rather than contrast women with men. The social category of religion is used
in a similar manner. All of the participants in this study are Muslims, and none of them deny this, or contrast being a Muslim with being of any other faith. But what they do is to contrast their approach to religion, and the approach of Rashtis and Gilaks in general, with the approach of others. The participants do so by claiming that people from other parts of Iran are more obedient to the religious codes and rules. This obedience is expressed though appearance and clothing, as well as gender integration. People in other cities and provinces are described as more religious and traditional. Rashtis, on the other hand, are described as pragmatic and reluctant to let religion dictate too much.

The differences described by the participants are manifested in different ways. People in the rest of the country are perceived as less concerned about the way they look and as following a stricter dress code, that is to say, the women wear a chador in comparison to Rashīti women, who usually wear mantos, pretty shawls, and make sure to thread their eyebrows and faces, as well as wear make-up in public. Rashīti women are thus described as caring so much about their appearance that they ignore religious regulations regarding proper hijab and modest clothing.

People in other places are also seen by the participants as having different views and more controlling men. While in other places, women are only seen in public places during certain hours of the day, in Rasht the men are less controlling and allow the Rashīti women to dress as they wish and spend time in public places whenever they wish. According to the participants, this can be seen when they visit other cities and are criticised and even attacked because of their clothing or simply because they are Rashītis.

The national and religious laws of Iran also stress gender segregation and as little contact with the opposite sex as possible unless they are closely related. According to the participants, the rules of gender segregation are followed in the rest of the country, and a girl or woman speaking or joking around with an individual of the opposite sex is frowned upon and looked at unfavourably. In Rasht and Gilan on the other hand, men and women feel free to interact and the parties are described as gender integrated, even in the villages where people are usually more religious. When visiting Iran for a week in March 2015, I soon realized that the biggest topic of conversation all over the city was that the new governor of the province had taken stronger actions against gender-integrated weddings, at least if they were held at wedding parlours. People lamented these new regulations, and seemed very shocked at the fact that they had to start following the national laws, some 35 years after the Islamic Revolution. Many mentioned how lucky the villagers were since they usually celebrate their weddings in some meadow close to their homes. In this way it would be possible for them to continue having the parties with men and women together. After returning to Sweden, I was told by
my relatives that the rules had been reversed, and people in Gilan were allowed to have their weddings gender-integrated once more.

Like the social categories of gender and religion, the social category of age is used by the participants to suggest regional unity. It is only used a few times, for example in Example 15. “The old woman in the milk queue”. There the social category of age is intersected with gender and religion, as Nasim speaks about two elderly women who are very keen on looking good and putting on what the participant describes as a lot of make-up. One of the ladies is also described as wearing her chador in such a way that her cleavage and legs are visible to others underneath. The way Nasim speaks about these elderly ladies and their pragmatic approach to religion as well as their wish to look good is the way young Rashti and Gilaki women are described in this study, meaning that regardless of their age Rashti women are very keen on looking good and less keen to abide by religious regulations.

8.4.2. The Rashti and Gilaki language varieties in relation to social categories

Through the conversations and participant observations conducted in the data gathering process it became evident the Rashti and Gilaki language varieties also play a role in the constructing of the Rashti identity of the participants. There is, however, a discrepancy between the participants’ values vis-à-vis Rashti and Gilaki as a dialect or a language, and how they value being a Rashti as well as Rashti and Gilaki culture. In the majority of conversations the participants expressed a highly positive opinion as to their backgrounds as Rashti, while at the same time the Rashti and Gilaki language varieties were mostly valued in very negative ways. Language is otherwise usually seen as part of a culture, but their ambivalence lies in the fact that that Rashti and Gilaki culture is described as better, more open, and comfortable, whereas Rashti and Gilaki linguistic varieties are mostly described as a source of shame, embarrassment, a way of signalling that one is either from the poorer parts of the city or from the countryside, and a way of losing status and social standing. In fact, when speaking about being a Rashti, the young women are very proud of it, and make sure they highlight all the good qualities of Rashti people, but when it comes to speaking Rashti, the participants refer to the Rashtis and them, thus contrasting themselves with people from Rasht. When they are asked if they themselves speak Rashti or Gilaki, over and over again the participants speak about how they only use these two varieties to joke around or make fun of each other, and how it is disrespected and neglected. Even the few times the participants claim that they like Gilaki and Rashti, and that
it would be a shame if these varieties would be lost, they are most eager to assert that they themselves are not willing to speak them.

The reason why the participants have such ambivalent feelings towards Gilaki and Rashti can be explained by the social categories these varieties are linked to according to the participants; first and foremost, it is the social categories of gender and class that are brought up. While in section 8.4.1. the social category of gender was described as a marker of differences between Rashti people and those living in the rest of Iran, it is also described by the participants to illuminate differences between how young men and women speak, as well as differences between young women depending on where they live and what class they belong to. According to the participants, young women make sure to speak Persian without a hint of an accent, while for young men there are no consequences, such as losing status when it comes to speaking Gilaki or Rashti. Women are described as more fanatical and sensitive when it comes to how they speak, and might even deny understanding any Gilaki or Rashti, whereas young men speak it with each other, and use it to curse each other and make no attempts of hiding speaking Rashti. One of the participants mentioned that her uncle would say that one could hear from afar whether a young man was Rashti or not thanks to his speech. The social category of gender does not, however, function on its own; it is repeatedly mentioned in connection with the social category of class when it comes to speech.

Speaking Gilaki or Rashti, as well as speaking Persian with an accent, is perceived by the participants as being linked to people who live in the poorer areas of the city, in other words people who belong to society’s lower classes. But being from the lower class intersects with gender, as the participants state that there are young men belonging to the middle- and upper-classes who speak with an accent or in Gilaki and Rashti, and are not subject to any consequences, meaning losing status or being mocked. The reason given was that women are more concerned with how others perceive them. Consequently, since speaking Rashti/Gilaki lowers one’s status, women are keener to speak what the participants described as “pure” or “proper” Persian. It must be mentioned that it is somewhat more complex, since the participants admit to using Rashti and Gilaki now and then, but only to joke around and make fun of each other, which is also shown in some of the examples when they use code-switching. Men, on the other hand, are discussed as not as influenced by the need to speak “purely” and “properly”, even though there were examples given by the participants where men were ridiculed and seen as losing his position and status when speaking Persian with an accent. To add to the complexity, there are times when the participants lament the fact that Rashti/Gilaki may be lost in the future, or they express a feeling of nostalgia by claiming that Rashti reminds them of old times.
As has been discussed above, the monolingual norm becomes apparent when the participants discuss speaking Persian with a Rashti or Gilaki accent. In several of the examples, the participants claim that it is very important to keep the different varieties apart, meaning that Persian should be spoken without any detectable Rashti or Gilaki accent. There are, however, a few examples that show that it is not only women who are made fun of when speaking with an accent, and that the monolingual norm is predominant for both men and women. This is seen in examples 3. “The man at the exhibition”, and example 9. “The classmate had an accent”, where the participants illustrate how men who speak Persian with an accent are either frowned upon or made fun of. This suggests that under certain circumstances, in these cases a photo exhibition with guests from Tehran where everyone would speak Persian and in a classroom, it is not acceptable for men to ignore the norm that one should speak accent-free Persian. For these two men, it resulted in a loss of status and position or being mocked by classmates, respectively.

All in all, I believe this thesis shows that Rashti society is in a transition period, where young people express highly positive feelings towards their regional identity and belonging, and at the same time have very ambivalent feelings towards the different speech varieties that surround them on a daily basis.


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Appendix 1

Presentation of the groups

1. Friend Group (Kamand and Samira)
The friend group is the group I became really close to; we basically spent most Thursday afternoons and Fridays together. Kamand’s family is old friends of my parents’ but I met her for the first time briefly at the end of my 2009 stay in Iran. Kamand, her four cousins, and I spent a lot of time together during my visit in Iran in 2011. Usually we would meet at her house to hang out, and on Thursday evenings we would drive around Golsar. This is something young people in Rasht do every Thursday evening, partly in order to meet future girl- and boyfriends. Besides this we would meet at cafés and restaurants, go mountain hiking, go to Tehran with her family, visit Masuleh with her parents, hang out at her female cousin’s dormitory on several occasions, go for morning walks, and visit the Gilan Heritage Museum with her mother and her cousins.

2. The Café Girl (Roya)
I met Roya through the literature group, and she was the only one in the literature group who had the time and interest to do an interview. We met four times, twice at Café Jangal, once at a birthday party and the last time at my place for the interview.

3. NGO Group (Shahnaz and Nasim)
I met Pari during my visit in Iran in 2009. In 2011 she was too busy to participate but took me to an NGO she is active in and introduced me to other members willing to participate in my study. There I met Shahnaz and Nasim. We soon became friends and they agreed to participate in a staged conversation. I used to meet them at the meetings of the NGO, but we also met outside of the NGO and spent time together.

4. The Theatre Girl (Lida)
I met the theatre group during a group tour I was invited to by a girl from the writing group. Lida, a 28-year-old young woman, is the sole member of this
group. As it turned out, she was also a member of the same NGO as Shahnaz and Nasim. Besides the trip we met five additional times, and we would hang out at Café Gilan, go to the movies, the Rasht Museum, walk around in the city, or work together at the NGO market.

5. Writing Group (Azar, Taban, and Fariba)
I came in contact with the writing group through an acquaintance from the 2009 period of fieldwork. My acquaintance introduced me to a man active in the Khaneye Farhang in Rasht, who in turn told me to visit the writing group for young aspiring writers. I attended almost every weekly writing class during the period of three months I was in Iran. Besides the classes we met on other four occasions in cafés, restaurants and the city park. The ones I met were mostly a mixed group of eleven women and men, aged 19 to 34.

6. School-Girls group (Minoo and Yalda)
I was introduced to the two 17-year-old girls in this group through my neighbour in Iran, who is in the same class as the two girls. I met this group only once, which was when they took part in the staged conversation at the home of one of the girls. They are also the only group I did an interview with during my first period of fieldwork in 2009.
Appendix 2

Questions and topics prepared for the first period of fieldwork in 2009

Below is the list of the questions that were prepared before leaving for Iran in 2009. The same questions were asked to all groups that took part.

- What do you do on your free time?
- What kind of music do you like?
- What kind of movies do you like?
- What limitations are there in the relationships between men and women in Iran?
- How do parents feel about their daughter having a boyfriend compared to their son having a girlfriend?
- What kind of differences in the way people behave are there in different parts of Rasht?
- How does life in Rasht and the villages differ?
- How do different parts of Iran differ regarding living conditions?
- What kind of problems are there in Iran?
- How is life in Iran compared to abroad?
- Do any of you speak Rashti?
- Do your parents ever speak Rashti?
- Will you teach your children Rashti in the future?
- Do you think Gilaki culture and identity will disappear in the future if the language is lost?
- If you hear anyone speak Rashti in public, what will you think of that person?
- What kind of problems do you think you have compared to previous generations?
Questions and topics prepared for the second period of fieldwork in 2011

Below is the list of the 9 topics with questions that were prepared beforehand.

Free time and the future
- What do you do in your free time?
- What kind of places do you go to with your friends?
- What kind of books do you read?
- What kind of music do you like?
- What kind of movies do you like?
- What would you like to work with in the future?

Men and women
- How are women and girls looked at and treated in society?
- Are there differences between the lives of women and men in Iran?
- Are girls and guys treated differently by their families?
- If you had a boyfriend, could you bring him home to your parents?
- If your brother had a girlfriend, could he bring the girl home?
- How does society look upon a girl who has a boyfriend compared to a guy who has a girlfriend?

Rasht and the villages surrounding Rasht
- What is life in Rasht like?
- How do girls in Rasht dress?
- Coming back to Iran this time, I have noticed that some girls dress in very short māntos, and at the same time the women in chadors has increased. Am I right?
- Have you ever been to the villages?
- What do you know about life in the villages?
- How do you think the life of people in the villages is compared to life in Rasht?

Rasht and other cities
- Do you think people from Rasht differ from people living in other Iranian cities?
- Do people from Rasht differ from people living in other cities in Gilan?
- Do you think people from Rasht differ from people in Tehran?

Generational differences
- Do the lives of your generation differ from the lives of women one or two generations ago?
Iran and other countries
- How do you think life in Iran is like compared to abroad?
- Do you think the lives of young people in Iran differs from the lives of young people abroad?

Societal classes and shopping
- How can one detect if a girl is from the upper-town, the middle-class, or the lower parts of town?
- How do the celebrations, for examples weddings, birthdays etcetera, differ depending on class?
- Where do you go shopping? Are there any particular areas or shops you prefer?
- Do people do their shopping in different shops depending on what part of town they’re from?
- Where do you think new trends in fashion come from?

Open-minded/modern vs. traditional
- Who are the “open-minded class”?
- Is being open-minded linked to a specific class?
- What does it mean to be open-minded?
- In Iran, what does being modern mean?
- How does a modern person dress?

Rashti/Gilaki
- Can you speak Rashti?
- Do you ever speak Rashti?
- What kind of style and clothing do you associate with someone who speaks Rashti?
- Is it true that a girl who speaks Persian with a Rashti accent will have difficulties getting married?
- Do people in the villages speak Rashti?
- Do you think Rashti will be lost in the future?
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