


A Comparative Minoritarian Study of Language Poetry of Iran and the United States

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Sama Khosravi Ooryad,
"A Comparative Minoritarian Study of Language Poetry of Iran and the United States"
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Abstract: In her article "A Comparative Minoritarian Study of Language Poetry of Iran and the United States" Sama Khosravi Ooryad analyses Language poetry of the United States (1970s) and Language poetry of Iran (1990s) through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concepts of minor literature and rhizomic text. The argument of the article is that the two movements, in both their poems and theoretical passages, carry potentialities to be related to Deleuzian concepts. The practice of minor literature, rhizomic text and book as machine is more evident in the works of U.S. language poets. Moreover, Iranian language poetry, while being analyzed alongside its American counterpart, has proved to be less conscious of the political status that minor literature advocates. Both movements' similarities and dissimilarities are sketched out while keeping alert to their significance in creating communities.

Sama KHOSRAVI OORYAD

A Comparative Minoritarian Study of Language Poetry of Iran and the United States

Once at the mere level of "the local, the particular, the partisan, the committed, the tiny, the peripheral, the unpopular, the eccentric, the difficult, the complex, the homely," Language poetry has now become "universal, general, uncommitted, vast, central, and, at the very least, quite moving in its intention, if not precisely beautiful in its actualization"(Izenberg, "Language Poetry" 143). The undeniable impact Language poets of the United States have had on poetry writing emerging after them is no new subject. They prized fragmented writing, eccentric and satiric poems, as well as the non-official and political status of poetry. Although currently Language poets are not writing under the rubric of their movement anymore, the debates around Language writing and Language movements emerging after them might still be a subject worth of scrutiny.

Charles Bernstein, who has been referred to as the most renowned poet and theorist of the movement by scholars and critics such as Oren Izenberg, Andrew Epstein, Marjorie Perloff, and many other critics, placed a lot of emphasis on going beyond the romantic idea of self and desires to reach a style of writing which instigates difference, generating "nomadic syntaxes of desire and excess that defy genre" (Bernstein, *Poetics* 120). Most Language poets, Andrew Epstein believes, hoped that "their aesthetic rebellion [would double] as a political one" and that their self-aware, fragmented writing would resist and subvert "the prefabricated, covertly ideological language produced by mainstream culture" ("Verse vs. Verse" 48).

Bernstein and Perelman directly pointed to writing poetry at the margins of literary canon, and towards a "poetics which is minor philosophy, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's sense of 'minor literature'" (Bernstein, *Poetics* 163). It is evident, then, that the impact of the "American universities' enthusiastic reception of continental literary theory is still active and visible" (Izenberg, "Language Poetry" 132) in the writings and theoretical claims of Language poets. What is noteworthy is the practicing of philosophical concepts and political oppositions Language poets applied in their texts and poems. For instance, Gilles Deleuze's concept of rhizome and minor literature have been practiced by Language writers to the extent that Ron Silliman entitled one of his poems after the Deleuzian concept, the Rhizome.

Two decades after the Language poetry movement in the United States in 1990s, an analogous poetry movement began to form in Iran based on and influenced by the world theories of language and writing that became the dominant spirit of the Iranian poetry scene. Reza Baraheni, the former professor of comparative literature at university of Toronto and the main figure of the Iranian Language poetry movement, believed language to be the main subject of each poem. By emphasizing writing language-based poems, Baraheni and his workshop students wrote collections of poems which later came to be called Language poems. Baraheni has been a well-known literary figure in the United States and Canada, having literary affiliations with poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Laurence Ferlinghetti. Baraheni's book, the Crowned Cannibal, was published in the United States, yet his theories on Language writing and Linguality have hardly been noticed by the researchers of the field. The fact that he shaped a movement out of his literary theory workshops when he was in Iran during the 1990s has been neglected or opposed by many. That might be the main reason why most of his workshop students, Shams Aghajani for instance, think that their movement "should breathe in a minoritarian space" (Unfinishing 99, all translations mine) ("چنین حرکتی می‌بایست در یک فضای اقلیتی تنفس کند") [99]).

In that spirit, the present study is an attempt at a comparative analysis of both movements in the light of Deleuzian concepts of rhizome, book as machine and minor literature. The emphasis on being a political oppositional movement is present in the theories of Language writing for the Language writers of the United States. Also, as mentioned above, Iranian Language writers assumed themselves to be a minority within the major literary scene. By providing a critical reading of both movements, with the help of Deleuze's concepts the present study aims to offer a new reading of both movements.

The Deleuzian question, asked in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, "The question is not: is it true? But: does it work?" (xv), is a radical question in studying major works of major poets of both movements. As Deleuze and Guattari believe, "minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (*Kafka* 16). Thus, the objective in analyzing both movements with the help of Deleuzian concepts is to throw light on the radical potentialities both movements have had or have offered, while trying to find similar/dissimilar aspects between Iranian and American Language poetry. In doing so the article will limit

the research to main figures, Charles Bernstein and Ron Silliman from the United States, and Baraheni and Aghajani from Iran.

As Deleuze leads us to understand, one of the main characteristics of the concept of minor literature is the deterritorialization of language meaning in the sense that minor literature "no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (*Kafka* 18). Another important feature of minor literature is that it connects the individuals to a political immediacy (18). With the concept of minor literature in mind, the primary insistence of Language writers in the United States on being local, non-academic, marginal, and peripheral is being highlighted as an approach towards minor literature.

The now renowned magazine "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" (1978-1981) which was co-edited by two of the prominent figures of the movement, Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, was a small magazine with no established status in the American literary canon of the time. The emphasis on writing poetry which was primarily language-centered and without any fixed meaning was the foremost intention of the magazine and the movement. Even the weird equal signs in the title of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine, aside from impeding the easy understanding of language and attracting attention to the language itself, has been said to represent the "political goal of equality the poets shared" (Epstein, "Verse vs. Verse" 46).

The concern with being political and outside the canon is also evident in their attempts to question the easy-to-understand, linear mainstream verse represented in the creative workshops in academic spheres. Bernstein, perhaps the main theorist of the movement, stresses eccentricity in writing in order to "acknowledge the significance of group identified poetics" and to shatter "the neoconventionalist ideal of fashioning by masterly artifice a neutral Standard English, a common voice for all to speak" (*Poetics* 120). Yet, it is also clear that such an epic movement could not be the product of a single person embodied in one magazine. The poets and writers of the movement had been active, publishing their essays and poems in an array of magazines and anthologies such as "Toothpick, Lisbon & the Orcas Islands (1973); Alcheringa (1975); Open Letter (1977); Hills (1980); Ironwood (1982); Paris Review (1982); The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book (1984); Change (1985); Writing/Talks (1985); boundary 2 (1986); and in the American Tree (1986)" (Hartley, "Textual Politics").

Besides, the Language poets' insistence on writing and publishing in small presses and, in other words, and remaining in the sphere of the political, rests, according to Epstein, on a series of assumptions: "First, no linguistic construction of reality is natural or neutral. Second, dominant public discourses cannot be trusted, especially in a post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era, when language has been debased by an imperialist state and a consumerist culture. Third, the choices that writers make—in grammar, syntax, narrative structure and subject matter—reflect ideology" ("Verse vs. Verse" 48).

So here again, the Deleuzian concept of minor literature with the radical argument that minor literature should be connected to a political immediacy is clearly claimed and practiced by the Language poets of the United States, at least in their first couple of years of being active. But, in the 1990s, the main figures in the movements became the academic professors of literary and creative studies, contradicting their avant-garde, subversive, and oppositional claims. Minor literature, in the Deleuzian sense of the concept, deeply differs from the literature of the masters, the established, and the institutionalized which is hated in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze, Guattari, *Kafka* 26)

Instead, it is the marginal figure, such as Frantz Kafka's marginal fictional characters, like employees, servants, etc. who are the concern of minor literature. Hence, by being absorbed into and recruited by the academic and public spheres, Language writers of the United States could no longer be categorized as practitioners of minor literature. In addition to that, the most obvious and important feature of canonization, as Epstein rightly asserts, happened with the "publication of Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology, edited by Paul Hoover, which devoted generous space to Language writing and placed its practitioners firmly on the official map of contemporary literature" ("Verse vs. Verse" 48).

Yet, being minor also means to drill holes within the major language, and it has been practiced by American Language poetry very seriously as well: "Yet doesn't the name 'marginalization' assume the existence of /some master page/Beyond whose justified (and hence invisible)/Margins the panoplies of themes, authors, /Movements, objects of study exist in /All their colorful, authentic, handwritten marginality?" (Perelman, *Marginalization* 5). The poem, "Marginalization of Poetry," is written like a manifesto, which not only does not resemble strict traditional essay writing style, but also intentionally deviates from it. Thus, by approaching and adhering to the minor literature, the Language poets of the 1970s and early 1980s produced significant and notable passages with regard to the concept.

There have been numerous individual revolutionary steps towards new and different types of poetry in Iran, as well. During the 1990s, a workshop or what Aghajani called 'the underground workshop'

was formed in the basement of Baraheni's house in Tehran that constituted poets and writers who were eager to learn about theorists and philosophers of the world. This was the starting point of what later became known as Language poets of Iran. Some of the main figures who gathered in the workshops consisted of: Hooshyar Ansarifar, Aghajani, Abbas Habibi, Rosa Jamali, Farkhondeh Haji Zadeh, Ali Vaziri, Roya Tafti, Shiva Arastooyi, to name a few. One of the aims of this workshop, which included many writers of the day, was "To understand present necessities and to define new necessities for poetry. Overall, such a literary workshop should enhance and distribute a new experimental step in our theory and in our literature that our workshop, during its time of activity, came to a better understanding of its needs and necessities. Naturally, such a movement, with its internal oppositions towards the existing norms and traditions should breathe in a marginal space" (Unfinishing 99) ("یکی از اهداف هر حرکت کارگاهی دریافتن ضرورت‌ها و تعریف ضرورت‌های تازه است. در مجموع ایجاد، تقویت و اشاعه یک حرکت تجربی در ادبیات و نقد ادبی ما، نیازی جدی بود که کارگاه در حین کار به ضرورت‌هایش وقوف بیشتری پیدا می‌کرد و طبیعتاً چنین حرکتی به دلیل تازه بودن، غرابت و مخالفت [99] آقاجانی، شکل‌های ناتمامی ["ذاتی‌اش با عادت‌ها و نورم‌های موجود می‌بایست در یک فضای اقلیتی تنفس کند

Baraheni, an English Literature graduate from Turkey, was familiar with most of the theories and literary discourses of world literature. Before him, there were certain writers and poets who wrote according to their own knowledge and talent. What the poetry workshop brought to Baraheni's students, was a community where poets and writers of the time could gather together and read about different theories of poetry. Although some of his more talented students like Aghajani, Rosa Jamali, and Hooshyar Ansarifar singled themselves out, the workshop united them as a community. The community thrived for five years holding sessions on poetry, theory, and philosophy.

In comparison to the U.S. Language poets, Iranian Language poets place little emphasis on the concept of minor literature; yet, the poetry workshop that Baraheni led, shaped a community of poets writing and practicing within small and obscure groups. Among the members of the workshop were young and non-elite poets of the Iranian literary sphere, such as Abbas Habibi, Ali Vaziri, and Aghajani. What is also worth noting is that the collective spirit within which the movement received nurture and momentum, was a turning point in the history of Persian literature. Alongside their emphasis that their literary activity is breathing in a minor space, what they achieved was a far more significant enterprise: they formed a community of poetic fire and flame in a marginal and non-famous space.

It was, arguably the first time in contemporary Persian literature that a literary workshop was going to shape a movement. Baraheni, although unaware of the political aspects of minor literature, was trying to write a kind of poetry that was language-centered, intentionally meaningless and without any reference to the outside world, hence very different from the official established religious poetry of the postwar Iran. He even argued here and there that he was the unwanted child of Persian poetry isolated from the literary canon: "I, as an unwanted child of my literary forefathers...believe that poetry cannot be created outside of language and the vast sphere it contains" (Baya No. 30:3) ("من، یک عاق [30:3] براهنی، مجله بایا] والدین ادبی به تمام معنا...می‌گویم شعر نمی‌تواند بیرون زبان، بیرون دریای زبان بایستد و شعر بگوید

As the Deleuzian concept of minor literature states, minor literature is "the connection of individual to the political immediacy" (Deleuze, Guattari, *Kafka* 18) and its concern is the oppressed and the people's concern. Based on such claim, one can argue that Baraheni and the whole Iranian Language poetry were not aware of the political statuses they could apply to their poems and their overall activities as socially obscure poets. Yet, as a community of unknown poets, writing in a deformed way on minor issues in the major official language, they had all the more approached the precipice of minor literature.

In his book *My Way, Speeches and Poems*, Bernstein elegantly thinks of the book "as a 'group' show" and he wants "the formal divergences among the poems to produce an "inner" space that seems impossible to evoke if there is too much uniformity among the elements" (57). Likewise, Deleuzian thought makes a distinction between the tree-like book that stems from the traditional thought with a fixed subject, (Colebrook, *Understanding* 19) and the book as "a little machine" (Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand* 4). So, "what is the relation (also measurable) of this literary machine to a war machine, love machine, revolutionary machine, etc.?" (4). The rhizomic text of the machine-like book deals with nothing but a system, a network of heterogeneous connections. The question "does it work/function in a radical way?" is a Deleuzian question in essence. It stems from the concept of the rhizome and the rhizomatic method. In contrast to the traditional thought and writing that "has a center or subject from which it then expresses its ideas," rhizomatics "makes random, proliferating and de-centred connections" (*Understanding* 10).

In Language poetry of the United States, the rhizomic text is practiced to some extent. The divergence from the fixed subject to achieve a heterogeneous network of meaning and intensities is practiced in Bernstein's book *My Way, Speeches and Poems*. His essay called "The Book as Architecture" is clearly set out like a network: "In organizing my books, including this one, I've tried to invent different

ways of ordering the individual pieces, avoiding, where possible, both chronological and thematically developmental patterns" (56). This self-awareness toward writing a deliberate non-linear piece of literature without any fixed structure accompanies the idea of rhizomic text in his writings.

Silliman similarly approaches rhizomatic network with regard to the concept of machine-like book in his poem "The Chinese Notebook," when he writes "20. Perhaps poetry is an activity and not a form at all. Would this/ definition satisfy Duncan? / 21. A poem can be found in a notebook, manuscript, magazine, book, or reprinted in an anthology. Scripts and contexts differ. How could it be the same poem?" (*The Age* 151, 12-16). At another instance Silliman composes that, "5. Language is, first of all, a political question. / 6. I wrote this sentence with a ballpoint pen. If I had used another, would it have been a different sentence?" (149, lines 16-18). Here, Silliman approaches the exact Deleuzian claim that a book "has no object" (Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand* 4) and that, as an assemblage, and as Silliman also puts by saying that language is a political question in essence, the book is connected to other assemblages rather than merely to itself (4).

Moreover, in his review of Language poetry and Silliman's poem "Tjanting," George Hartley affirms Silliman's argument which considers Language a kind of labor process and that his poetry draws attention "to the materiality of the words as words, not simply as transparent signifiers" (Hartley <<http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/hartley.html>>). Language that becomes a fetish, in the capitalist society, Silliman believes, should be attacked and fragmented. Following the same guidelines, there is a collection of poems by various language poets collected in one book *Legend*, as a way to show that the unity of a book is no longer the same. The structure of the book is deformed in *Legend* and the poets seem to attempt to show the image of this uncommon book by arranging the poems in as much disarray and chaos as possible. Thus, American Language poetry, with its emphasis on the depiction of the wholly chaotic truth or totality, is edging closer towards the notion of the rhizomic network and heterogeneous, machine-like book.

Nevertheless, Iran's language poetry does not fully succumb to the idea of regarding book as a rhizomic text. Thus far, throughout a decade, multifarious books on poetry have been published on the subject of Iranian postmodern poetry and collections of poems by the language poets practicing language-centered poetry. In contrast to the US-American Language poets, Baraheni was openly against the sociopolitical statuses or messages that a book, here a book of poetry, should carry when he composed: "Even if I loved a world full of equality and free of conflict, I swear to my worker forefather that I do not intend to achieve equality by means of my poetry" (Baya No. 26:3) ("اگر حتی عاشق تساوی و عدل) [26:3] [براهنی: مجله بایا] و جهان بی طبقه و غیره هم بوده باشم، به جد کارگرم قسم که حاضر نیستم از طریق شعرم به آن چیزها برسم").

Yet, in choosing the title of his most seminal book, Baraheni uses a phrase which indicates a political historical fact. The title of Baraheni's book *Addressing Butterflies: Why I am no longer a Nimaei Poet?* carries a political simile. Butterflies refer to the babies in their mother's wombs while they were held captive as political prisoners in the Shah's regime. In addition, Baraheni's earlier books of poems, *God's Shadow* for instance, carry much more political opposition against the Shah's oppressive regime during the 1970s. It was during the 1990s that Baraheni turned to writing language-centered poetry, insisting that poetry's subject matter should be independent from political or social facts of the outside world. He consistently and forcefully made the comment that the poem should not have a message to change the society and that "poetry's goal should be to create an aesthetic effect" (*Addressing* 168) ([168] [براهنی، خطاب به پروانهها] "هدف شعر ایجاد تأثیر زیباشناختی است").

There are also few instances of 'book as rhizomic text' in Iran's language poetry scene. For instance, the photo-poems of Mohammad Azarm, which does not look like a book at all, is a collection of photos in which the disseminated lines of his poetry are portrayed. The words of each poem are dispersed throughout the subject of the photo, carrying almost no meaning arranged that way:

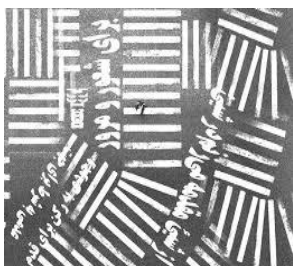


Figure 1. "Crossroad", a photo-poem by Mohammad Azarm.

This collection of photo-poems is not even collected in a volume in the form of a classical paper book. Instead, it consists of internet-made pictures with some fragmented words and sentences dispersed on it. In this sense, they might carry some potential for functioning as a machine in the Deleuzian sense of the term. Azarm's collage-like photo-poems represent the failed unity of the poem and the book in general. In the Deleuzian philosophy, the classical book is "as noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority (the strata of the book). The book imitates the world, as art imitates nature" and "the law of the classical book is the law of reflection" (Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand* 5). Collections like that of Azarm's photo-poems attack the traditional and conventional take on the book, thereby coming closer to the notion of rhizomic text with no root or a fixed beginning.

There are other instances of the book designed in unusual ways among Iranian Language poetry that deviate from the fixed notion of the unchangingly orderly and organized book in its general and conventional sense. Interestingly enough, and following Azarm's photo-poem's pattern, Mehrdad Falah, another Iranian language poet, designs his poetry within the structure of what he calls Khandidani (reeding, mixture of seeing and reading) poems. Aghajani also writes his collection of poems in a multi-genre fashion, including reports, personal statements, dialogues, travel writings, etc. The long poem "Turkey: Analyzing Roya" may be considered a rhizomic text in comparison to the previous sublime Persian poems written by the great masters of Persian poetry throughout the history of Persian literary canon. Yet again, all these few instances of deviation from the conventional and classical version of representing their books are not consciously connected to another political or social immediacy. They remain pure aesthetic objects in their own rights, through which some political immediacy cannot be readily addressed.

Bernstein regards language as a disjointed system that should be addressed and opposed to. In his poem "Language, Truth, and Logic," he directly addresses the logical statements on certain tenets of language by many repetitions he makes within the poem: "I. Why did you steal/ that money? You/ know you acted wrongly/ in stealing. Stealing/ money is wrong. You/ shouldn't do it, / shouldn't have done it, / not what you/ did. And you promised/ you wouldn't. You/ ought to keep your/ promises" (*Girly Man* 69). Yet there is another counterpart to the static structure of language, and that is the linguistic machine, which is, according to Deleuze, diachronic and dynamic (*Lecerce*, 181). The whole effort of a writer, in the philosophy of Deleuze, is that he or she "must push language out of the ruts of habit, and create extraordinary words for the most ordinary uses. In other words, in the metaphor that aptly sums up Deleuze's conception of language, we must "make language stutter" (26).

Silliman, in his exquisite long prose poem, "Ketjak," talks directly and thoroughly about the concept of language. His poem rises against healthy systematized language and attempts to be written according to The New Sentence that he has conceptualized in his book which goes by the same title. Following the New Sentence, the whole long poem is written based on paragraphs with frequent shifts and turns, with sentences that make almost no meaningful link in relation to their previous and next sentences. Silliman tries to keep the readers fully involved in the poem in order to make them aware of the whole process of writing by saying, "What of a poem that told you what it did, casual-like, with no evident respect for your condition as reader? Isn't it true that you're a victim here?" (*The Age* 132). The whole piece consists of statements that seem to have been uttered so seriously. It continues monotonously with so many repetitive interrogations all over the poem: "Did you know what to expect? Are you sure where you're going? Can you see the horizon, the town, the boys at play? Does smoke get in your eyes? Do the white shirts in the centerfield bleachers distract you? Do the terms apply?" (158). By writing in this manner, Silliman seeks to put the theory of the New Sentence into practice, making use of language in order to challenge or make it stutter in the Deleuzian sense of the term.

The same effort can be tracked in the poetry of Iranian language poets, namely Baraheni and Aghajani. By writing profusely on poetry and language, they have proved their opposition against the centrality of language and the traditional linguistic system of writing. For instance, in the long prose poem, ترکیه: بررسی رویا (Turkey: Analyzing Roya), within which the language is regarded as a mere game, Aghajani composes, "Some words like "Istanbul"/Have not any poetic pronunciation//One cannot pause, when there is an A before B or N, /nor can they be passed quickly. They cannot be passed slowly either. /we arrived in Istanbul in such a condition" (Inevitable 11) (کلماتی تلفظ شعری ندارند/استانبول/بین م) (11). And the same pattern is repeated at length along the poem. In one of his earlier book of poems, مخاطب اجباری (The Forced Reader), Aghajani clearly is against the centrality of meaning in poetry by saying, "No one except me/ arranges words beside each other/ so rhythmical/ I told this to God as well/You tell your God this too/to the dear president/ too/so who is the crazy one?" (*Forced* 17-18) "مثل من هیچکس نمیچیند/کلماترا این‌گونه/کنار هم موزون/به خدا هم گفتم/ته هم به خدایت بگو/به ریاست محترم جمهور/هم/پس دیوانه کیست؟" (17-18) [مخاطب اجباری].

On the other hand, throughout his long poem "اسفار اربعه" ("Four Journey"), Hooshyar Ansarifar, another Iranian language poet, has made the pause itself stutter within language in the most absurd way by writing, "pause pause pause, open parenthesis close open close open, do not (pause) and here is my period. / come along with me from the parenthesis, I am not pause anymore from pause from this period" (Payam No. 20) ("مکت مکت مکت پرائنٹ باز بسته باز بسته باز (مکت) نکنید این هم نقطه‌ام / از پرائنٹز بیابید با من از دیگر ([20] انصاریفر، مجله پیام شمال) مکت نیستم از مکت از این نقطه").

In addition, considering Deleuze's notion of stuttering as making language tremble from head to toe (Deleuze, *Essays* 109) and to create silence out of words (113), Baraheni's poems show such efforts as to make language stutter and make words silent as well when he writes, "Some people say that plain truth / Some say that unsaid truth/ I say the inarticulate truth:/This:" (Addressing 95, my trans) [براهنی، خطاب به] "یک عده آن حقیقت روشن را می‌گویند/یک عده آن حقیقت ناگفته را می‌گویند/من آن حقیقت ناگفتنی را می‌گویم/ این را: " ([95] پروانه‌ها Or his poem "دف" (Tambourine): "It is Dafdafdaf which is hit/ On the target/ Dafdafdaf's hit/ It is dafdafdaf/It is dafdafdaf/ It is dafdafdaf that is hit (13) ([13] "دَفْدَفْدَفْسْت که می‌گوید/ روی هدف/ دَفْدَفْدَفْسْت که می‌گوید/ "دَفْدَفْدَفْسْت که می‌گوید [13]).

In the first poem quoted above, there is a parody of the truthfulness of the thought. The poet mentions people who talk of the truth as though it were easily accessible, and by doing so questions the truth itself. By talking about people who are acting as if there actually is a truth, Baraheni's three-line short poem concludes in silence. In this poem Baraheni arguably pushes the language to its limits. The other poem, a significant work in the context of the whole Iranian language poetry movement, is called "دف" (Tambourine) and is a performance poetry in practice. The whole poem is the daffing of the daf or rather the jingle of the tambourine. A wholly musical poem, it is written as if the word daf itself is playing the daf. Word here is treated as a movement, and as the stuttering of the musical movement of language. It can be compared with the famous example of Deleuze's favorite poet, Gherasim Luca, in whose poem, "Je t'aime passionnement" ("I love you passionately) the poet composes, "passionné nez passionné je/ je t'ai je t'aime je/ je je jet je t'ai jetez/je t'aime passionné t'aime/je t'aime je je je passion j'aime" (Deleuze, *Essays* 110).

The poem has been quoted in the essay, "He Stuttered" by Deleuze. All through the essay, Deleuze is conceptualizing language as a stuttering and, therefore, as a rhizome within the language itself, through different examples. Luca's poem, according to Deleuze, is the stuttering effect of language and not an affectation of speech. The Deleuzian element, that is the stuttering effect of language, can also be applied to the poem "دف". Whether such a poem leaves an effect of the language to stutter remains vague, but all the more, it is certain that Baraheni's and other Iranian language poets' poems are thoroughly drawing language to its limits through repetition and disjunction of the words. The rhizomic effect of the poem "دف" though, is not that powerful, because the poem starts from a fixed point just to perform the sound of the tambourine, and ends with the same subject.

Yet, Baraheni's theory about poetry did not emerge in the scene of world theories until he conceptualized it in 1997 as the theory of language or, in better terms, زبانیت (The word Languageality/Linguality). The term was coined by Baraheni primarily in his book *Addressing Butterflies* and signifies any poetry that foregrounds not only language but also the Linguality of language. Such poetry puts forward and problematizes language. The theory of زبانیت (Languageality) became the core concept of Iranian Language poetry since. زبانیت (Languageality) is not the language of poetry, but the Linguality of the language of poetry. There is a space within language, as Baraheni argues, where language is rendered free of meaning in order for it to become beautiful: "When the jungle of the completed and repeated sentences of verses and rimed prosas and conventional endings of sentences and hemistiches catch fire, and a land of ashes remain, we are not left with any other option but to invent new contexts for language where saplings begin to grow" (Karnameh: No. 47:14) ("وقتی که جنگل" جمله‌های کامل و تکراری بیت‌ها و نثرهای مسجع و پایان‌بندی قراردادی سطرها و مصراع‌ها، از فرط تکرار ننگهان در ذهن آتش گرفت و بیابانی از خاکستر به [47:14] کارنامه] "جا ماند، چاره نداریم جز اینکه زمین زبان را برای خود اختراع کنیم و نهال‌های تازه و از آن بالاتر، بذرافشانی نو نو را تجربه کنیم").

Language poets, with promising theories and writings, approached the boundaries of the concept of minor literature. Believing that what they were doing was opposing official canonist poems and movements, U.S. language poets made huge attempts in the direction of writing different and deformed poems, deviating from the conventional movements and beliefs in poetry. The major language was being fragmented through writing fragmented poems; in that sense, they obviously were trying to be minor among the majors.

Iranian Language poets, following Baraheni's lead, tried to differentiate their style of writing from the conventional ideological poems of their predecessors. Believing it to be minor, they tried to gear their poetry towards a language-centered coloring and not a meaning centered one. Moreover, Iran's language poetry, though not following a historical strategic avant-gardism, always claimed to be avant-garde and minor at the same time, avant-garde in the sense that they claimed to write a kind of

poetry that follows the universal postmodern avant-garde poetry, and minor in the sense that they also tried to grow into the framework of an exclusive group of writers who wrote against the fixed forms of accepted poetry. Their endeavor was to touch minority layer that is concealed by the layer of great literature. And yet, at the end of the day, what happened with their poetry was the unadorned and rather identifiable character it gave off for being one of the postmodern poetry movements.

U.S. language poetry's avant-gardism, on the other hand, was a more historical one. Having claimed to have predecessors like Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukovsky and others, they were historically and professionally avant-garde; language poets were not only aesthetically avant-garde, but also socially so. Bernstein's book, *A Poetics*, was clearly a collection of essays on modernism and modernist poets; yet in the same book, Bernstein declares that "poetics is art of the weak, that is poetics is "Minor Literature" as would Deleuze and Guattari say" (163). For Bernstein, minor literature was the art of the weak, though his own poetics seems to have appeared as a major voice of poetry in the United States.

Whether their poetics is minor literature or not is still debatable, but what is clear in the poetry of Bernstein and Silliman were soundly opposed to their predecessors, which means they were oppositional avant-gardes. The concept of collectivity, which is another aspect that manifests itself in minor literature, has also been adhered to by language poetry both in the United States and in Iran. In practice, this translates into the important search for becoming a community of poets, and writing poetry emulating and inspiring one another. They have consciously been a community of poets, an underlying characteristic that can be potentially considered among the prominent ways to identify them.

Being collective also differs from being minor, in the sense that collectivity is expected to take coherent shape in following a minor path. In his book *Marginalization of Poetry*, Bob Perelman points out those first person-poems are far from marginal poetry: "widely published and taught, it has established substantial means of reproducing itself" (9). Perelman's argument seems reasonable, but such a line of reasoning can also be applied to language poetry both in the U.S. and in Iran, since the language movements, long after their initiation, have now been widely noticed, written upon, and also practiced.

Note: The above article is a revised excerpt from Khosravi Ooryad, Sama. *Language Poetry of America and Language Poetry of Iran: Rhizomatics*. M.A. Dissertation. Tehran: Shahid Beheshti University, 2015.

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