



Why Do Brains Drain? Brain Drain in Iran's Political Discourse

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Abstract

This article examines and compares the discursive representation of Iran's brain drain in the political discourse of Iranian authorities during the time of Mohammad Khatami and Mahmud Ahmadinejad, two Iranian presidents with different political orientations. The aim is to uncover the global political goals of the speakers. Lee's (1966) model of migration is used to define and outline the factors and groups that are involved in the process of brain drain and van Leeuwen's (2008) sociosematic framework for the representation of social actors is applied to examine how different actors are represented in different discourses. During the first period reformists ascribed brain drain to political and managerial issues caused by the Islamic principalists. The main actors in their discourse about brain drain were the opposition and the migrants and brain drain was pictured as a product of the pressures and limitations imposed by the Islamic principalists on the university students and the educated class. With this representation reformists seemed to try to win the support of the youth while keeping themselves in a secured zone. In the second period Mahmud Ahmadinejad denied brain drain. The Islamic fundamentalists attributed the phenomenon to the migrants' lack of religious faith and the government ascribed it to their lack of national attachment. Politicians and authorities as a social actor group were almost absent in the governments' remarks. Such definition and representation of brain drain by Islamic principalists and fundamentalists seemed to follow the objective of legitimizing government's actions and policies in front of their supporters.

Keywords: brain drain, political discourse, discursive representation, reformists, Islamic principalists

1. Introduction

In this article, we analyze the discursive representation of Iran's brain drain during the last decade through textual analysis of authorities' remarks published in newspapers and periodicals during the time of two presidents namely, Mohammad Khatami and Mahmud Ahmadinejad and attempt to account for differences and similarities of these representations.

Representations are articulated through particular perspectives or ideological positions. We can distinguish different representations of the same social event. In Fowler's words (1991:4), 'there are always different ways of saying the same thing, and they are not random, accidental alternatives. Differences in expressions carry ideological distinction (and thus differences in representation)'.

The primary aim of linguistic choice is to form ideas and beliefs rather than merely reporting of factual of the events and the processes. In other words, function overshadows meaning. For example the terms *farar-e maghz-ha* ('brains' fleeing'), *mohajerat-e nokhbegan* ('the emigration of the elite'), *ekhraj-e maghz-ha* ('firing brains'), and *hejran-e maghz-ha* ('exodus of brains') are not synonymous expressions in terms of the way they are interpreted; however, they are all used by different groups to refer to the same social practice of 'the emigration of the experts and scientists' in different contexts.

The linguistic resources demonstrating this selectivity are not limited to the vocabulary of a given language; grammar is part of this resource as well. Grammar is 'meaning potential', i.e. a resource for creating meaning in the form of wordings (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Here are two examples that illustrate the point:

(1)

While unlike developed countries we could not attract even 100 non-Iranian scientists, we have made millions of our greatest genetic and scientific assets flee and leave the country and (we) have made the country empty of the resources and riches of intelligent genes.

در حالی که بر خلاف ملل مترقی نتوانسته ایم حتی 100 فاضل و هوشمند غیر ایرانی را به داخل کشور جذب نماییم بزرگترین سرمایه های ژنتیکی و علمی کشور در شمارگان میلیونی را به گریز و ترک کشور واداشته ایم و کشور را از منابع و خزائن ژنتیکی هوشمند تهی ساخته ایم. (فرار مغزها بزرگترین خسران ملی علی ابراهیمی اسفراینی)

(2)

Some at different academic and professional levels migrate to other countries, especially west, exactly at the time when they should dedicate the results of their efforts (of training and experience) to their own country.

برخی از افراد درست در زمانی که می بایست حاصل تلاش خود را نثار مملکت خویش کنند، در مقاطع مختلف علمی و تخصصی اقدام به مهاجرت به کشورهای دیگر به ویژه غرب می کنند. (فرار مغزها چرا؟! فاطمه تورانی)

Leaving aside a host of lexical features and focusing exclusively on the formal aspect, we find that two important syntactic processes, namely 'objectivation' and 'role allocation' allow different representations of a single social practice. While in example (1) 'millions of our greatest genetic and scientific assets' is assigned a passive role and it is the grammatical object of 'made flee and leave', 'some at different academic and professional levels' in example (2) takes an active role and is the grammatical subject of the sentence.

The remarks of politicians towards different issues present and legitimate their decisions and policies on a global level (van Dijk 2005) to win the consensus of the society in the way they envisage it. Our analysis of the authorities' remarks about Iran's brain drain therefore focus on the global functions of these local remarks.

2. Brain Drain in Iran

In this article our assumption of brain drain is based on the definition of Iran's Institute for Research in Planning and Development (IPRD) that refers to brain drain as a process in which the continuous or periodically significant migration of elites and experts from a country or an economic region to another country or economic region is witnessed. This can be caused by economic factors, political reasons, to escape from war and for security reasons, to achieve job security and satisfaction, or to able to use educational facilities.

Large-scale one-way movement of Iranian skilled people to more developed countries has been the subject matter of many Iranian newspaper articles and official statements. Brain drain has always been a controversial topic in Iran but during the last two decades it has turned into an ever-growing issue. Many of the International Science Olympiad medal winners and single and double digit rank holders in Iranian state university entrance examination¹ have been attracted to more developed countries. According to Management and Planning Organization Weekly (2010, June 4) 90 out of 125 Iranian Olympiad medal winner students are now studying in universities in the US. Based on statistics reported by International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2006, Iran ranked highest in brain drain among all developing countries, with an estimated 150,000 to 180,000 people exiting Iran yearly. This is the number of Iranian people who have applied for migration to more developed countries like Canada and Australia based on the migration laws and regulations in which skill and educational degree are significant and crucial factors. According to IMF's report the exit of this 150,000 to 180,000 educated force is equivalent to a 50 billion dollar withdrawal of wealth from Iran.

The reflection of this phenomenon in media and political discourse has not always been the same in different periods. In 2001 Iran's Student News Agency (ISNA) reported that some 220,000 leading academic elites and industrialists have left Iran for western countries over that last year and quoted the Minister of Science, Research and Technology at the time that they are unlikely to return. On the contrary, few years later during his first presidency term (2005-2009) Mahmud Ahmadinejad denied Iran's brain drain issue and declared that the theory of brain drain does not apply to Iran.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Lee's Model of Migration

The theoretical framework of this study first of all focuses on Lee's model of migration. Lee (1966: 50) sorts the factors which enter into the decision to

migrate into four areas: 'factors associated with the area of origin, factors associated with the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors'. These factors are then broadened by studying their positive, negative, or neutral weight in the decision to migrate. For example, a good research and education system at destination is a plus while high living cost is counted as a negative point.

In the Iranian context, Fallahi and Monavaryan (2008) identifies four main categories of scientific, educational, and research related factors; economic, welfare, and living condition factors; cultural and social factors; and political and managerial factors influential in the migration decision of Iranian educated individuals. These are negative factors related to the area of origin or push factors. The study arrived at the conclusion that the two latter categories seemed to be the most influential, an argument that has been rejected by Hajiyousefi and Behmard (2006). Instead, Hajiyousefi and Behmard (2006) suggests the stronger influence of pull factors, positive factors associated with the area of destination and lists the financial and economical motives as the dominant rationales for the migration of educated Iranians.

3.2 Political Discourse

Political discourse is more than producing or perceiving discourse in political contexts and by political actors. Rather, it is a dialogue determined by the interest of the producers that follows the political aims of representation or misrepresentation, legitimization or delegitimization, and control of governments (van Dijk 1997; Chilton 2004). Thus, a local political move on brain drain should be realized within global political functions and goals such as legitimating government decisions and actions, engaging in opposition, and distributing social resources. This is done through influencing the definition of the situation which others come to formulate.

A common strategy to (official) political discourse about Iran's brain drain is legitimization which starts with different representations of social actors. To analyze the representation of social actors in this case study we apply van Leeuwen's (2008) sociosematic framework. Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework for the representation of social actors is based on the concept that when a social practice is represented, it is incorporated within a certain context. The context determines which elements of the practice must be present or absent and prominent or backgrounded. It also controls the degree of abstraction or generalization, the orders of events, explanations, legitimations, and evaluations. This was first introduced in pedagogical discourse by Bernstein (1990) as the 'Recontextualizing principle'.

In this paper we study the Iranian political discourse of politicians and officials about brain drain based on the factors identified in Lee's (1966) migration model and their association with the represented social actors in discourse. Accordingly, migrants, Iranian politicians and policy makers, and social actors associated with the destination countries can be identified as social actors involved in the process of migration. By analyzing how these factors and the social actors are represented in the political discourse of brain drain we can reveal how the practice of brain drain is defined by Iranian politicians and what major goals and functions do the speakers follow based on the defined situation.

4. Data and Method

This study investigates the representations of Iran's brain drain in the political discourse of the authorities as published in newspapers and periodicals between 2000 and 2010. The data comes from speeches, newspaper interviews, remarks made in a news conference or in a government meeting, parliamentary discourse, and Friday prayer speech reflected in the Iranian press in two different periods. We minimized the role of newspapers in this and the perspectivisation power of newspapers in the way they report on this issue is kept out of the analysis as much as possible.

The first period, between 2000 and 2005, was during Mohammad Khatami's presidency when the reformists² were in power in Dowlat (government) and Majlis (parliament). In the second period, between 2005 and 2010, when Mahmud Ahmadinejad has been the president both institutions (Dowlat and Majlis) were dominated by the Islamic principalists.³

Before explaining why a comparison of these two periods is significant, it is necessary to elaborate on the structure of power in Iran. At the top of Iran's power structure is the supreme leader (Velayat e Faghih) who is a religious authority. According to Iran's Constitution, he is responsible for the delineation and supervision of 'the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran'. The president who is popularly elected is the second highest ranking official in Iran and is the head of government (Dowlat). Next is the Iranian Parliament (Majlis), a unicameral legislative body whose members are publicly elected every four years.

Reformists seek reformism and more liberal approaches in establishment; they criticize the regime's principles and policies arguing that institutionalized religious domination was wrong. On the other hand, the Islamic principalists who dominated Dowlat (government) and Majlis (parliament) during the second period are the reformists' opponents. They support the supreme leader and want to preserve the system of guardianship.

The reason why we chose to compare these two periods is that though the two governments have had different socio-political perspectives, they both seemed to disclaim responsibility for brain drain.

To gather data for the study we used *namayeh*⁴ and *namamatn*⁵ databases. These databases are electronic archives of all the newspapers, periodicals, and journals that enable subject, date, and author search. As a result, we came up with 450 articles, interviews, reports, and news items published in newspapers and periodicals between 2000 and 2010 in which at least one reference to brain drain was spotted. This number was about 3.5 times bigger in Khatami's presidency compared with Ahmadinejad's. This seems rational as in the first period the reformists tried to open the political atmosphere for critic. Newspapers were allowed more freedom to criticize the power system. The number of NGOs has significantly increased during that time. It was during this period that the terms 'freedom of speech and the press', 'civil rights', and 'NGOs' began to be used more frequently in the political discourse and newspapers. However, with the principalists' rise to power during the second period the restrictions increased.

Out of the total number of 450 articles, interviews, reports, and news items published in these two periods, we selected those items for the qualitative textual analysis that contained quoted statements of government officials concerning this issue to find out how these officials approached the issue, what explanations and solutions they presented, and for what purpose. Table 1 shows the number of texts about brain drain in two periods.

The texts used for the case study are of different genres (interviews, speeches, news items, or reports) produced by individuals and groups who had diverse political and social orientations in different times and settings. In order to minimize the risk of being biased, therefore, we need to take into account the information about the social and political contexts in which the utterances were produced as well as the intertextual relationships between these utterances.

Time Period	Number of text that had at least one reference to brain drain	Texts Including Direct Statements
2000-2005 (Reformists)	349	19
2005-2010 (Islamic Principalists)	101	9

Table 1. Number of texts

5. Analysis of Data

Given the detailed context and the methodological orientation explained above, we are now ready to analyze the examples of brain drain representation in the political discourse of Iran during the two specific periods.

5.1 Period One: 2000-2005

5.1.1 1999 Tehran University attack

First we begin with the analysis of the representation of factors that affect the migration decision in the political discourse of this period with having Lee's (1966) model in mind.

During years 1997 to 2005 that the so-called reformists were in power the opposition struggled to stop their plans however these conflicts were not only confined to the political sphere but also involved the society and especially the academic atmosphere and the university students who wanted a reform. The most representative example was when forces of opposition entered Tehran University grounds in the early hours of July 9, 1999 and attacked the students in their dormitories. This was a reaction to a demonstration in Tehran University's dormitory area in which students protested against closing a reformist newspaper in previous days.

When we studied the political discourse of the reformists at that time about brain drain, we found out that the objections of the Islamic principalists towards reform and more freedom has been pointed out as a key factor affecting brain drain and the opposition's reaction to the demonstrations of university students in 1999 was the most controversial example.

Though this representation is in agreement with the results of Fallahi and Monavaryan's (2008) study in the field of human geography that ascribes brain drain to the factors associated with the political and managerial category of Iran's governing system, it seems to be more than a mere representation of facts.

Interestingly, few remarks have been made during this period about factors other than the political factors that affect brain drain whereas Hajiyousefi and Behmard (2006) and Salehi Omran (2006) list financial and economic factors the most influential in the migration decision of educated Iranians. Moreover, there was a huge number of newspaper articles, reports, and interviews with distinguished university students during that time that reported financial factors decisive. It seems that reducing the causes of Iran's brain drain to the political issues at that time was a strategy used by the reformists to advance their own project. They seemed to employ these strategies in defending themselves against the criticism that they have failed in providing financial and employment opportunities for the university graduates and presenting managerial solutions for the economic issues of the educated class. That is, through condemning the opposite group for suppressing the university students and educated class, the reformists tried to keep themselves in the secure zone and safeguard the social base they had amongst this class and maintain their advocacy and support.

In example 3 when the vice minister of Science, Research, and Technology in Khatami's cabinet was asked about brain drain and the ministry's plans and policies to attract the university students in a newspaper interview, he shifts the attention from his ministry to the opposite group and uses *آمارها* ('statistical data') and *چندین و چند گزارش و خبر و مقاله* ('multiple reports, news stories, and articles') as justification. This representation seems to follow two main aims, one, distracting the hearer's attention from the role of the ministry in managing the issue and two, winning the support of the university students who were getting disappointed by the reformists by condemning Tehran University attack.

(3)

Statistical data reveals that after the tragedy of attacking the university's dormitory, the rate of brain drain has risen and **multiple reports, news stories, and articles** on the subject of brain drain have been written and broadcasted in recent years.

آمارها نشان می‌دهند پس از فاجعه کوی دانشگاه پدیده فرار مغزها از شتاب بیشتری برخوردار شده است و چندین و چند گزارش و خبر و مقاله در سال‌های اخیر در ارتباط با فرار مغزها نوشته و منتشر شده است.

Example 4 is from the speech of Director General of domestic students affair of the time at the reformist controlled ministry of science of the time amongst

the student members of scientific organizations a few months before the 7th parliamentary election where he mentioned فشارها ('tensions') (that seems to refer to the opposite groups and their actions) as the only cause of the existing problems of university students and graduates and the sole influencing factor in their leaving decision. He then continues his speech with explaining the affirmative actions and achievements of the ministry. This representation seems to be performed in a calculated manner in order to give the kind of impression to the students that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain, in this case the students' support and advocacy (Goffman 1959).

There is a similar pattern in example 5. It is from a news interview with deputy director of macroeconomics section of budget and planning organization. Again, we see a positive self-representation by the reformists rather than a (real) discussion about brain drain, its causes, and the proposed solutions.

(4)

If there were not the existing **tensions** in the country, today we could witness comprehensive prosperity and the distribution of knowledge and sciences in the country and also the return of the elite instead of brain drain.

در صورتی که فشارهای موجود در کشور نبود، امروز شاهد شکوفایی همه‌گانه و توزیع علوم و دانش در کشور و همچنین بازگشت نخبگان و مغزها به جای فرار مغزها بودیم.

(5)

(They) do not respect the shining talent of the (educational) elites in such a way that in most cases we have witnessed **the repression of the luminaries and honorary figures**. We honor them when they have passed away... Would we be able to stop the flight of human resources when financial corruptors blockade the reforms?

هیچ ارزشی برای استعدادهای درخشان افراد نخبه‌قائل نمی‌شوند به گونه‌ای که در بیشتر موارد شاهد سرکوب مفاخر و بزرگان بوده‌ایم و زمانی که فوت می‌کنند از آنها تجلیل می‌کنیم... وقتی رانت‌خواران سد راه اصلاحات می‌شوند، آیا می‌توان مانع فرار سرمایه‌های انسانی شد؟

Example 6 is an extract from a newspaper interview with president Khatami's consultant, Mohammad Reza Tajik on the occasion of research week in 2002. Note that the phrases روح ثبات و آرامش و امنیت را ربوده‌اند ('have stolen the spirit of stability, peace, and security') and تلاش کرده‌اند به رنگ خود درآوردند ('attempted to regulate'), though vague, are embedded within the context in which the process of lexical selection fits in well with the July 9, 1999 Tehran University incident. Since the subjects of تلاش کرده‌اند به رنگ خود درآوردند ('attempted to regulate') and the next two the sentences ('they') are the same, these sentences also imply the actions of the opposite groups and the reformist government is kept absent in the statements. This exclusion seems purposeful.

(6)

In current situation, our planers not only were unsuccessful in providing the psychological and emotional circumstances to attract and activate the elite, but also have made the remaining opportunities tremendously exposed to their own political, sectarian, ideological, and personal considerations and **have stolen the spirit of stability, peace, and security** from scientific and research environments. **Many have attempted to regulate** science and scientist instead of adjusting themselves according to **their legitimate and acceptable consequences**. **They invite** the researchers and intellectuals **with one hand** but push them **away with several hands**. **They talk a lot about their dignity but fail to provide even their basic needs and requirements**.

در شرایط کنونی تدبیرداران ما نه تنها در فراهم آوردن شرایط و بستر روحی و روانی جذب و فعال کردن نخبگان فکری موفق نبودند، بلکه زمینه‌های موجود را نیز سخت دستخوش ملاحظات سیاسی، جناحی، ایدئولوژیک، و شخصی خود کرده‌اند و روح ثبات و آرامش و امنیت را از فضاهاى بسیاری تلاش کرده‌اند علم و عالم را به رنگ خود درآورند نه خود را با علمی-تحقیقی روده‌اند. با یک دست پژوهشگران و اندیشمندان را به پیشِ مقتضیات مشروع و مقبول آن انطباق دهند. اما با چندین دست آنان را به پس می‌رانند. بسیار از شأن و منزلت آنان سخن می‌گویند، اما از فراهم آوردن تمهیدات و نیازهای اولیه نیز دریغ می‌ورزند.

5.1.2 Self and Other: Reformists vs. Principalists

With Lee's model of migration in mind, three main categories of social actors can be identified in the process of migration: the migrants; the officials in government and the legislation system; and the individuals and organizations involved in this process in the destination countries or the west in general. This classification is not rigid though, and there is no one to one relationship between the social actors mentioned in political remarks and these categories all the time. Rather, there are times that some social actors are excluded for a particular reason or sometimes a category of social actors is further divided into other groups, for example, different and sometimes opposing groups inside the government, legislation system, and the ruling regime in general that should be analyzed in context.

Looking at the examples of this period, a fine line between the reformists and their opposition in the newspaper remarks and interviews of the reformist during those years is witnessed that is displayed by blaming brain drain on the rival groups only. The reformists as a social actor group were radically excluded from the discourse and although the officials were assigned an active responsible role wherever they were mentioned in the political discourse throughout this period, these officials were part of the power system only.

In almost all of the reformists' statements a general pattern of role allocation is witnessed: applying an active responsible role to the opposition politicians and/or a passive undergoer role to the migrants. The only cases in which the migrants have been assigned active role were when they were the actors of the verbs that express feeling and thinking.

Since the target audience of these statements and remarks was public and specifically the university students who were the main actors in the process of migration and brain drain, representing the opposition as the only responsible

actor for the problems and troubles that stimulate the migration of the university graduates and showing sympathy to the migrants by giving them passive or active sensor roles seemed to follow the objective of winning the support of this social group. In fact, by entitling the youth to migrate because of the deficiencies that the opposite groups have created and by employing the explained role allocation strategy, the reformists seemed to show a political gesture to save university and the youth as a political base.

Similar to what we put forward in the previous part, the analysis of social actor role allocation in the political discourse of this period about brain drain shows that instead of (actually) analyzing the situation, the reformists were engaged in an attempt to win back the social base that once supported them in the presidential election of 1997 and 2001 and got disappointed gradually by bolding their commonality that is, condemning the opposition and the Islamic principalists who were accused of being involved in Tehran university attack and similar reactions towards (against) the university, elites, and freedom of speech.

However, this representation of the opposition in the discourse of the reformists was indistinct and a vague discourse is witnessed throughout the period. The linguistic strategies of social actor suppression, backgrounding, and indetermination were dominant in the statements. This vagueness seemed to be partly the product of self-censorship due the regulation and restriction of speech and political oppression in Iran's political system but mostly as a result of the political considerations and politically gauged discursive strategies. These considerations and collusions were the main reasons why there was a perceived frustration with the reformists amongst the university students especially after 1999 Tehran University dormitory attack.

There were cases where the opposition was excluded but we could infer with reasonable (though never total) certainty who they were. That is, they were excluded from the texts but this exclusion has left a trace: their actions and the undergoer role assigned to the migrants. This social actor backgrounding is evident in examples 7-9. In these examples the subjects of فشارها ('pressures'), کارشکنی‌ها و تنگ‌نظری‌ها ('narrow-mindedness and sabotage'), and سرکوب ('repression') are omitted by the use of nominalization strategy. That is these words function as nominals, although they refer to actions.

(7)

If there are no **pressures**, the (educated) elite will come back.

اگر فشارها نباشند، نخبگان برمی‌گردند.

(8)

Sometimes **narrow-mindedness and sabotage** motivates this group (to leave the country).

برخی مواقع نیز کارشکنی‌ها و تنگ‌نظری‌ها انگیزه بیشتری در این گروه بوجود می‌آورد.

(9)

(They) do not respect the shining talent of the elite in such a way that in most cases we have witnessed **the repression of the luminaries and honorable figures**, and we honor them when they have passed away.

هیچ ارزشی برای استعدادهای درخشان افراد نخبه قائل نمی‌شوند به گونه‌ای که در بیشتر موارد شاهد سرکوب مفاخر و بزرگان بوده‌ایم و زمانی که فوت می‌کنند از آنها تجلیل می‌کنیم.

Apart from social actor backgrounding in the above example which is manifested in the exclusion of the actor of 'repression', there is also a case of social actor indetermination. That is, the speaker anonymises the social actor in charge. Here the actor of 'do not respect' is anonymised using the technique of 'pro-dropping' in Persian. Pro-dropping or *null anaphora* is a syntactic phenomenon in some languages including Persian which allows the speaker to leave out the pronoun. Here in example 9, subjective pronoun 'they' in the pro-drop language of Persian is only marked as part of inflection of the verb 'they do not respect'.

Social actor indetermination is also witnessed in examples 10 and 11, but in another form. The use of the word بسیاری ('many') in example 10 involves the strategy of aggregated indetermination. Similarly the phrase ده‌ها نهاد و مرجع مختلف ('tens of different authorities and institutions') in example 11 contains the same strategy and allows the speaker not to address the actor directly.

Example 10 includes value assumption and it is triggered by مشروع و مقبول ('legitimate and acceptable'). That is علم و عالم ('science and scientist') is desirable and بسیاری ('many') is undesirable.

(10)

Many have attempted to control **science and scientists** instead of adjusting themselves according to their **legitimate and acceptable** consequences.

بسیاری تلاش کرده‌اند علم و عالم را به رنگ خود درآورند نه خود را با مقتضیات مشروع و مقبول آن انطباق دهند.

(11)

Tens of different authorities and institutions interfere in the university affairs and the outcome of their interference is only more problems and limitations.

ده‌ها نهاد و مرجع مختلف در امور دانشگاه‌ها دخالت می‌کنند و نتیجه دخالت آنها تنها ایجاد محدودیت و مشکلات بیشتر است.

Examples 12 and 13 are different from the rest of examples in this section. While other examples are extracts from political interviews or newspaper talks where the desired audience is public, these two are from a speech by the president of time, Mohammad Khatami amongst the directors of the gifted students' educational centers published in the journal of the center. These remarks are the only examples where the reformists are mentioned. Here

there is no trace of positive self-representation or negative other representation. This is why the speaker uses the pronoun ما ('we'). Throughout the rest of the examples there is no trace of this social group or their actions.

The pronoun ما ('we') and the phrase بچه‌ها مان ('our children') bring to mind the father-child relationship that implies the sense of responsibility of the speaker. Here بچه‌ها مان ('our children') is the sensor; it is given the active role in relation to the process of احساس کردن ('feeling'). The same can be interpreted from example 13 where کسی ('one') is the sensor in relation to the process of احساس کردن ('feeling'). Moreover, note that کسی ('one') in example 13 is the subject of the action جواب لازم را گرفتن ('get the necessary response') however, typical to the Iranian political discourse, the statement involves the process of nominalization through which the real actor of جواب لازم ('the necessary response') is excluded.

(12)

We definitely need to provide an environment in which **our children feel** secured and hopeful toward the future, they must not be disappointed.

ما باید حتماً زمینه‌هایی فراهم بکنیم که بچه‌ها مان در اینجا احساس امنیت بکنند و احساس امید به آینده بکنند، یأس در آنها ایجاد نشود.

(13)

One whose talent is discovered and walks in this path, if **feels** that he does not **get the necessary response** for developing the rest of his talent and making it productive in a given society, will naturally faces to a place where more attention to this matter is paid.

کسی که استعدادش کشف شد و در این مسیر قرار گرفت، اگر احساس بکند که برای پرورش بقیه این استعداد و بارور کردن آن جواب_لازم را در یک جامعه نمی‌گیرد، به طور طبیعی متوجه جایی می‌شود که آنجا به این مساله بیشتر توجه می‌کند.

6.2 Period two: 2005-2010

6.2.1 Categorical Denial

In 2006 several news reports and articles in newspapers and on the web broadcasted the International Monetary Fund brain drain statistics according to which Iran ranked highest in brain drain among all developing countries, with an estimated 150,000 people exiting Iran yearly. This controversial news made Iranian officials take different positions toward the issue. The government of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad (Dowlat) totally denied Iran's brain drain, a claim that was followed by the parliament's reactions. This seems similar to the case of elite racism which in van Dijk's (1992) term there is no property more characteristic of it than its denial. The use of the disclaimers 'Brain drain is not meaningful but ...' in example 14 and 'Brain drain does not exist in the country. Of course...' in example 15 clearly shows this denial.

The phrases ‘the theory of brain drain’ and ‘attracting the skilled people’ in example 16 refer to the idea of *brain circulation*, a concept that suggests the benefits of social contacts and international experiences of the skilled forces who migrate for their own country. This justification strategy is typical of president Ahmadinejad who represents an issue differently by changing the definition of that issue.

(14)

Brain drain is meaningless in contrast attracting the skilled elite is meaningful and it is necessary to work hard for that.

فرار مغزها معنی ندارد اما در مقابل آن جذب نخبگان معنی دارد و باید برای آن تلاش جدی کرد.

(15)

Brain drain does not exist in the country. Of course some migrate to other countries and we do not see any harm in that, in my opinion the number of scientific elites that we have in the country is enough and with them we can take the country forward.

بحث فرار مغزها در کشور وجود ندارد البته به کشورهای دیگر می روند و ما در این امر عیبی نمی بینیم، به نظر من همان تعداد نخبه علمی ای که در کشور هستند کافی است و می توان با استفاده از آن ها کشور را به پیشرفت و سعادت رساند.

(16)

The theory of brain drain does not exist in today’s Iran and this expression must be omitted from the literature.

نظریه فرار مغزها در ایران امروز وجود ندارد و این اصطلاح باید از ادبیات حذف شود.

6.2.2 Principalists in Majlis vs. Dowlat

To analyze the picture that the politicians of this period gave of Iran’s brain drain we initially study the reasons and explanations that they provided in their remarks and try to find out why and with what purpose they did so.

In the previous section we explained how Dowlat (government) denied brain drain. This was followed by the reactions of the adversaries of government of Mahmud Ahmadinejad in Majlis. A group of Islamic principalists in Iran’s parliament objected to the government’s denial and considered political and managerial weaknesses influential in the migration decision of educated Iranians. Example 17 and 18 are instances of these reactions. The expressions رفتارهای نامتعارف و نامعقول (‘strange and irrational behaviors’) in example 17 and محدودنگری (‘narrow-mindedness’) in example 18 are lexically loaded and seem to refer to the political and managerial situations that are the reasons for the dissatisfaction of migrants. Note that the lexical choices, though, have changed over time: the expression فرار مغزها (‘brain drain’) which was used in the previous period is replaced with a milder alternative خروج (‘exit’) in example 17. These statements were produced in a situation that the status of Majlis has been weakened during the presidency of Ahmadinejad and

government refused to cooperate with parliament. This raised the reaction of the principalist adversaries in Majlis who criticized Ahmadinejad for his government's actions that questioned the independence and credibility of Majlis and rose to a power struggle between Dowlat and Majlis. The critical reactions of the parliament members about brain drain seem to be instances of this challenge rather than expressing and exchanging views about the issue.

(17)

The **exit** of the brains shows that we have not been able to attend to the social and economic demands of the elite and have even upset them **with strange and irrational behaviors** and this could be a stimulus for their exit.

خروج مغزها نشان می‌دهد نتوانسته‌ایم به مطالبات اجتماعی و اقتصادی گروه نخبه توجه کنیم و حتی با رفتارهای نامتعارف و نامعقول در نزد آنها رنجش ایجاد کرده‌ایم که همین امر می‌تواند زمینه‌ساز خروج آنها از کشور باشد.

(18)

A group of the elite may tolerate the current situation and continue to work in the country depending on their level of commitment, self-confidence, and desire. However, this is not a disclaimer for the policy making, decision making, and legislation for not only we have been unable to provide them with an environment of growth and productivity, but also we have restricted this environment with our narrow-mindedness.

ممکن است گروهی از نخبگان بسته به میزان تعهد، خودباوری و علاقه‌مندی که دارند شرایط موجود را تحمل کنند و به فعالیت در کشور ادامه دهند اما این مساله از نظام سیاست‌گذاری، تصمیم‌گیری و قانون‌گذاری رفع مسوولیت نمی‌کند چرا که ما نه تنها نتوانسته‌ایم فضای رشد و شکوفایی را برای آنها ایجاد کنیم بلکه با محدودنگری این فضا را محدود ساخته‌ایم.

6.2.3 Fundamentalists vs. Migrants

The Islamic fundamentalists, who became more powerful after the presidency of Mahmud Ahmadinejad, however, tried to divert the attention from the negative factors in Iran's social and political system that causes brain drain (push factors) and attributed it to the personal characteristics of migrants. Contrary to the previous period that the reformists tried to win the support of potential migrants who were mostly their backers, the government officials of this period did not make any attempt to attract the migrants. Rather, this political group seemed to push the migrants away because to them they were the opposing social class that they better off without them. Examples 19-21 are extracts from the speech of these Islamic fundamentalists amongst Qom seminary students, one of their supporting social bases. These examples show how the speakers tried to articulate, justify and maintain their interests, as well as their attempt to win the active consensus of their supporters. Here instead, the Islamic fundamentalists were engaged in an attempt to attract and keep the support and consensus of the religious class. In these statements one can observe a contrastive picture of religious beliefs on the one side and materialistic needs on the other; a sort of binary oppositions which 'are not neutral but motivated, because they meet the expectations and classification

system of the target audience' (Bazzi, 2009: 39). The uncommon adjacency of the words مادی ('earthly') and درآمد ('income') in example 19 presupposes the existence of a sort of 'spiritual income'. The expressions ایثار ('sacrifice') and گذشتن از تمایلات نفسانی و اقتصادی ('giving up of the carnal and financial desires') in example 20 also denotes this contrast. In general, all these three statements convey the same negative presupposition: those who migrate lack religious beliefs and have materialistic motives for migration.

(19)

There is a viewpoint in many of our youth that they do not allow themselves to be under the dominance of the West and being their servants for more **earthly income**.

این نگاه در بسیاری از جوانان ما وجود دارد که به خود اجازه نمی‌دهند زیر سلطه غرب قرار گیرند و برای درآمد مادی بیشتر نوکری آنها را بکنند.

(20)

The martyrs' sacrifice must be given more significance. The sacrifice for today's student could be **the giving up of the carnal and financial desires** and the serving of the poor and the society. If this culture is established amongst the generation of our students we will no longer witness brain drain.

باید ایثار شهدا پررنگ‌تر شود. ایثار برای دانشجوی کنونی می‌تواند گذشتن از تمایلات نفسانی و اقتصادی و خدمت به محرومان و جامعه باشد. اگر این فرهنگ در نسل دانشجویان ما جا بیافتد دیگر شاهد فرار مغزها نخواهیم بود.

(21)

If **the spiritual motives** appear and occur more in our youth the issues like brain drain will no longer happen.

اگر در جوانان ما انگیزه‌های معنوی بیشتر ظهور و بروز نماید دیگر مسائلی چون فرار مغزها بوجود نمی‌آید.

The trace of Islamic ideology is also evident in example 23 but what is new in this example and example 22 is the introduction of a nationalist ideology into the elite discourse. This is manifested in مملکت خودشان ('their own country') in example 22 and هویت دینی و ملی آنها ('their religious and national identity') in example 23. These examples are part of an interview with a parliament member close to the president published in *Hamshahri*, a state daily newspaper. The relation between Islam and nationalism has been a controversial issue in Iran. The principalists have considered nationalism as an opposition to the Islamic ideology but the contemporary Iranian society, especially the youth, consider their national identity very important and have strong national feelings. Here in these examples the speaker wisely condemned the migrants by employing the nationalist discourse.

However, whether it is weak faith or lack of national identity the main purpose is to highlight the role of migrants in Iran's brain drain and shift the attention from the situations and circumstances caused by or involved the

group/groups the speaker is a part of that stimulated brain drain. That seems to be the reason why there is no trace of the expression فرار مغزها ('brain drain') that implies an irritant factor in the process of migration.

(22)

We cannot force them, however, we would like our experts to come back to influence the development of **their own country**.

ما نمی‌توانیم آنها را مجبور کنیم، ولی دوست داریم متخصصان ما که در خارج از کشور هستند با برگشتن روی پیشرفت مملکت خودشان تاثیر بگذارند.

(23)

We would like **their religious and national identity** to reach such a level at which they themselves would have the desire to come back.

ما می‌خواهیم هویت دینی و ملی آنها به جایگاهی برسد که خودشان تمایل به برگشتن داشته باشند.

6.2.4 Who Is Responsible?

Apart from examples 24 and 25 role allocation pattern in the second period has changed compared with the first period. Examples 24 and 25 however, are similar to the examples in the first period. That is, the active responsible role is assigned to the officials whereas; the migrants are given the active sensor role. However, this similarity in the form followed different purposes in these two periods. While in the first period the reformists used this strategy to attract the political support of the potential migrants, the opposing members of parliament in the second period seemed to get engaged in a power struggle with the government that attempted to weaken them and delimit the authority of the parliament. In these examples although the officials are the responsible actors, they were kept unspecified just like the previous period. This milder criticism seemed to be due Iran's general policy of unity during the second period that was emphasized by the supreme leader of Iran in frequent occasions.

The occurrence of social actor indeterminateness is manifested in pronoun ما ('we') in examples 24 and 25. The pronoun 'we' in Persian language has many applications. An application of this pronoun is when a writer or speaker is criticizing someone or a group but to make his criticism milder and less direct he considers himself amongst those he is criticizing. This example may be compared with example 26 from the previous period where the speaker draws a line between himself and those he criticizes by using the pronoun 'they'.

(24)

The exit of the brains shows that **we** have not been able to attend to the social and economic demands of the elite and have even upset them with strange and irrational behaviors and this could be a stimulus for their exit.

خروج مغزها نشان می‌دهد نتوانسته‌ایم به مطالبات اجتماعی و اقتصادی گروه نخبه توجه کنیم و حتی با رفتارهای نامتعارف و نامعقول در نزد آنها رنجش ایجاد کرده‌ایم که همین امر می‌تواند زمینه‌ساز خروج آنها از کشور باشد.

(25)

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(26)

(**They**) do not respect the shining talent of the elite in such a way that in most cases we have witnessed the repression of the luminaries and honorable figures, and we honor them when they have passed away.

هیچ ارزشی برای استعداد‌های درخشان افراد نخبه قائل نمی‌شوند به گونه‌ای که در بیشتر موارد شاهد سرکوب مفاخر و بزرگان بوده‌ایم و زمانی که فوت می‌کنند از آنها تجلیل می‌کنیم.

The trend of applying the sensor role to those who migrate has not been consistent throughout this period. In fact this trend has reversed in the statements of the politician near Mahmud Ahmadinejad who tried to use the strategy of positive self-representation and keep the government in the safe zone. In examples 27 and 28 the migrants are given the active role with reference to the action of برگشتن ('to come back') while, in both examples the sensor is ما ('we'), which refers to the government and its supporting politicians.

(27)

We cannot force them, however, **we would like** our experts **to come back** to influence the development of their own country.

ما نمی‌توانیم آنها را مجبور کنیم، ولی دوست داریم متخصصان ما که در خارج از کشور هستند با برگشتن روی پیشرفت مملکت خودشان تاثیر بگذارند.

(28)

We would like their religious and national identity to reach such a level at which they themselves would have the desire **to come back**.

ما می‌خواهیم هویت دینی و ملی آنها به جایگاهی برسد که خودشان تمایل به برگشتن داشته باشند.

Another interesting point is that the discourse of Islamic fundamentalist politicians of this period (examples 19-21) involved only social actor group of migrants and the officials and politicians were radically excluded with even no trace of their activities in their discourse. This radical exclusion was accompanied with assigning the active role to the former group, the migrants, with the intention of making the authorities secured.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this study we have critically analyzed the Iranian political discourse on the topic of brain drain during the time of two presidents with different political orientations and explained different representations of the same issue, here brain drain, with a reference to Lee's (1966) model of migration and van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic framework for the representation of social actors.

During the first period the reformists ascribed brain drain to political and managerial issues caused by the Islamic principalists. The main actors in the picture that the reformists tried to demonstrate in their statements about brain drain were the opposition and the migrants. More precisely, they seemed to define brain drain as a product of the pressures and limitations imposed by the Islamic principalists on the university students and the educated class. By entitling the university students to migrate and condemning that part of the power system which opposed them for the migration of the youth, the reformists seemed to follow two main objectives: 1) winning the support of the youth and 2) keeping themselves secured.

The first thing to note in the second period (Islamic principalist) is that the term brain drain has been almost omitted from the discourse of politicians and has given its place to a milder alternative of 'exit'. This was at a time when the International Monetary Fund statistics about Iran's first rank in brain drain among all developing countries was a controversial topic in the media and public discourse. The government of Mahmud Ahmadinejad seemed to adopt such discourse in order to manipulate the public (most especially its potential supporters) by disclaiming any responsibility regarding the issue firstly and foremost by categorical denial. There were only few examples (the remarks of some parliament members) that assigned the active responsible role to the politicians and they were unspecified. In the government remarks the social actor group of politicians was almost absent and brain drain was attributed to the characteristics of the migrants (their lack of religious faith or national attachment) who were not a potential political base for the government. In fact, the government aimed to legitimize its actions and policies in front of the public through staging a definition of brain drain that was in its interest and control the addressees' impressions through influencing the definition of the situation which they come to formulate (Goffman 1959). This was also evident in the speeches of the Islamic fundamentalists to the seminarians.

In spite of everything, regardless of the political orientation of the politicians of different periods, what seemed to be common in the representation of brain drain is that the governments both resorted to the strategy of responsibility

disclaiming. This was done by attacking the opposition in the presidency of Mohammad Khatami and by condemning the migrants in the time of Mahmud Ahmadinejad.

Notes

- ¹ The Iranian State University Entrance Examination rank is a strong indicator of intellectual and scientific propensity in Iranian academic atmosphere.
- ² The reformists (اصلاح طلبان), or 2nd of Khordadians (دوم خردادى‌ها) (which refers to the date of President Mohammad Khatami's 1997 election victory in the Iranian Calendar) are a group of political parties and organizations in Iran who supported President Mohammad Khatami's plans to change the system to include more freedom and democracy.
- ³ The principalists (اصولگرایان) are a group of political parties and organizations in Iran who are committed to the principles of political Islam and Islamic revolution, and the principle of guardianship of the Islamic jurist (velayat e faghih: ولایت فقیه).
- ⁴ <http://www.namaye.ir/website/index.aspx>
- ⁵ http://ilagroup.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=51

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