

Identifying *Daš Mašti* in Pre-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema: A Linguistic-Semiotic Study

Noonik Darbinian
Yerevan State University

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Abstract: This study investigates the semiotic and linguistic construction of *daš mašti*, urban masculine figures that became prominent in mid-twentieth-century Iranian popular cinema, within the broader cultural, social, and historical framework of *Film-Farsi*. Drawing upon the theoretical insights of Christian Metz, Roland Barthes, and Mikhail Bakhtin, the article examines how cinematic language produces ideology through sign systems, embodied gestures, and vernacular speech. Through close analysis of canonical films such as *Qaysar* (1969), *Daš Akol* (1971), and other representative works, the study demonstrates that the *daš mašti* functions simultaneously as a linguistic, moral, and cultural signifier. Specifically, it investigates linguistic features such as phonological variation, lexical creativity, idiomatic expressions, pragmatic markers of solidarity, and stylistic deviations from standard Persian, showing how these elements construct group identity and perform masculinity on screen. Employing a linguistic-semiotic approach, the study reveals that the *daš mašti* embodies a hybrid discourse, a synthesis of urban colloquial speech, moral codes associated with *javanmardi*, and performative markers of masculinity, that mediates between cinematic representation and social norms. Ultimately, the article argues that the *daš mašti* in pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema is not merely a cinematic archetype or folkloric trope but a complex socio-linguistic construct through which cultural identity, morality, and ideology are articulated and negotiated.

Keywords: *Daš mašti*; Film-Farsi; heteroglossia; iconization; Iranian cinema; *javanmardi*, semiotics.

Noonik Darbinian

E-mail: noonik.darbinian@ysu.am

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5186-874X>

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1. Introduction

French film theorist Christian Metz (1974) famously proposed that “the study of cinema should derive methods from linguistics,” asserting that cinema operates as a language in which each shot functions as a unit within a syntagmatic chain. Following this paradigm, Iranian pre-revolutionary cinema, particularly the *Film-Farsi* genre, provides a rich corpus through which to examine how cinematic signs construct social and moral meaning. Within this framework, the *daš mašti*, a distinctly urban, lower-class male figure prominent between the 1950s and 1970s, emerges as a complex semiotic and linguistic signifier.

The present study investigates the *daš mašti* as a cultural-linguistic phenomenon, analyzing how this archetype conveys ideological and social meanings through both visual and verbal codes. It applies linguistic and semiotic theories to the analysis of cinematic sequences, exploring how the *daš mašti*'s gestures, clothing, speech, and interactions produce a system of signs that embody moral values, class identities, and social tensions in pre-revolutionary Iran.

The objective is twofold: first, to trace the linguistic features and vernacular associated with *daš maštis*; and second, to examine how filmic language (through montage, sound, and mise-en-scène) reproduces these features to construct an ideological narrative. Through a semiotic reading of selected films, this article situates *daš maštis* as linguistic subjects within a socio-historical continuum of Iranian masculinity, morality, and urban subculture.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach that combines close textual and semiotic reading with a synthesis of the existing descriptive literature on southern-Tehran urban vernacular. It is not a corpus-linguistic or sociophonetic study, and this scope should be understood as a considered methodological choice rather than an oversight.

The semiotic analysis developed in Sections 6 and 7 is based on a small, purposive corpus of two canonical *Film-Farsi* productions directed by Masoud Kimiai, *Qaysar* (1969) and *Daš Akol* (1971), selected because they are the works most consistently identified in the film-historical literature (Issari 1989, Naficy 2011, Moridi and Shahvaroughi Farahani 2023) as paradigmatic instances of the *daš mašti* archetype. These two films are read closely for their visual, musical, and dialogic construction of the *daš mašti*, drawing on repeated viewing of the films themselves alongside the published film-historical scholarship cited throughout this article.

The phonological, morphological, lexical, and pragmatic forms discussed in Section 6 are drawn from the existing descriptive and lexicographic literature on *daš mašti* and *jaheli* speech rather than from an original transcription and coding of film dialogue undertaken specifically for this study. They are treated here as attested features of the register that the two focal films are argued to evoke and stylize, not as data independently measured from those films' soundtracks. The semiotic readings of *Qaysar* and *Daš Akol* offered in Section 7 are the author's own interpretive analysis of specific scenes, dialogue, costume, and music, and should accordingly be read as one plausible reading among others rather than as an exhaustive or statistically representative account of the *Film-Farsi* genre as a whole.

This scope is a limitation as much as a method. A corpus-based study systematically transcribing dialogue across a larger sample of *Film-Farsi* films, with inter-rater coding of the linguistic features discussed in Section 6 and, where recordings permit, acoustic measurement of the prosodic patterns described impressionistically in this article, would be needed to test the interpretive claims advanced here empirically; this possibility is returned to in the Conclusion.

3. Literature Review

The intersection of linguistics and film semiotics has been explored in foundational works by Metz (1974), Barthes (1977), and Eco (1976), who viewed cinema as a structured system of signs analogous to language. Their structuralist framework provides the theoretical basis for understanding cinematic meaning as emerging not only from verbal language but also from visual composition, gesture, and other non-verbal signifying practices. In the Iranian context, however, the linguistic dimension of cinematic representation has often been overshadowed by socio-political and ideological analyses. While scholars such as Naficy (2011) and Mottahedeh (2008) have extensively studied post-revolutionary cinema and its discourses of modernity, and Moridi and Shahvaroughi Farahani (2023: 40–45) have more recently offered a discourse-analytic account of the *jahel*, *loti*, and *kolāh makhmali* figure across the Second Pahlavi era, there remains a relative scarcity of linguistic-semiotic research specifically on pre-revolutionary *Film-Farsi* dialogue. Golchinnezhad and Afrouz (2022: 258–262) have shown, in a sociolinguistic study of Persian film dubbing, that *jaheli* speech continues to be treated by present-day audiences and translators as a recognizable, class-marked variety associated with working-class male characters, evidence that the register discussed in this article has a documented afterlife beyond the pre-revolutionary period itself.

Within Iranian film scholarship, the *daš mašti* and *jahel* figures have primarily been discussed as moral, political, or class archetypes (Issari 1989,

Moridi and Shahvaroughi Farahani 2023), but not as linguistic phenomena. This gap provides a compelling space for the present study, which examines the linguistic and semiotic patterns through which *daš mašti* articulate cultural identity.

In sociolinguistic terms, the *daš mašti* vernacular constitutes a “restricted code” (Bernstein, 1971), a language variety shaped by social boundaries and group solidarity. It contains phonological, morphological, and lexical deviations from standard Persian that signify membership in a specific socio-cultural community, southern Tehran’s working-class neighborhoods. This paper therefore situates *daš mašti* speech within the frameworks of register theory (Halliday 1978) and identity construction (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

The semiotic component of this study builds on the structuralist concept of cinematic language as an articulation of ideological meaning (Voloshinov, 1973). The *daš mašti*’s speech and actions serve as “signs of social evaluation,” in Voloshinov’s sense, encoding cultural attitudes toward honor, masculinity, and class hierarchy. By applying a linguistic-semiotic lens, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how cinematic representations of vernacular speech shape collective memory and national identity.

4. Theoretical Framework: Film as a Linguistic System

Christian Metz’s seminal theory of *le langage du cinéma* remains central to the present analysis, as it provides a structuralist foundation for understanding the ways in which film operates as a system of signification. (Metz 1974: 28) argued that cinema, like language, possesses both syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions: the syntagmatic referring to the sequential organization of shots within a narrative chain, and the paradigmatic referring to the selection of images, motifs, and editing choices available within a given cinematic code. Through this analogy, cinematic meaning emerges not merely from individual visual units but from their relational configuration within broader narrative and ideological structures. In this sense, each shot, sequence, or montage functions as a syntagm whose combinatory potential constructs what Metz calls a “filmic discourse.” The *daš mašti* figure, therefore, can be read as a recurrent cinematic sign whose meaning is constituted by its position within a network of oppositions, between virtue and vice, modernity and tradition, or urban sophistication and moral authenticity.

Building on Metz, Roland Barthes’s semiological model of multiple levels of signification further refines this interpretive framework. Barthes (1977: 45) distinguished between *denotation*, the literal, representational content of an image, and *connotation*, the cultural, ideological, and affective meanings that accrue through social codes and intertextual associations. Applying

Barthes's model to Iranian *Film-Farsi*, and specifically to the *daš mašti* subgenre, reveals that these films operate simultaneously across several semiotic strata. On the denotative level, they depict urban spaces, working-class male protagonists, and familiar social environments. Yet on the connotative level, they articulate complex ideological narratives of moral heroism, nostalgia for pre-modern communal values, and resistance to perceived moral decay. The *daš mašti* character thus becomes a mythic condensation of collective longing, a symbolic response to the tensions produced by rapid modernization and social transformation in mid-20th-century Iran.

Valentin Voloshinov's (1973:187) Marxist theory of the sign provides a further ideological dimension to this semiotic analysis. His assertion that "wherever a sign is present, ideology is present too" foregrounds the inseparability of language, signification, and socio-political struggle. From this perspective, the *daš mašti* is not a neutral cultural archetype but a discursive construct through which ideological contradictions are materialized. The recurring gestures, costumes, and idiomatic expressions associated with the *daš mašti* operate as semiotic vehicles of resistance and moral critique. They encode the aspirations of subaltern masculinity and the ethical values of neighborhood solidarity, while simultaneously revealing anxieties about moral corruption, Westernization, and the erosion of traditional codes of honor.

Complementing these perspectives, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981:121) concept of *heteroglossia* illuminates the dialogic and polyphonic nature of *Film-Farsi*. Bakhtin emphasized that every utterance exists within a field of social voices, each carrying distinct ideological inflections. Within *Film-Farsi*, the *daš mašti* discourse interacts with competing registers: the refined diction of the bourgeois elite, the sentimental voice of melodrama, and the popular idioms of the working class. The *daš mašti*'s vernacular, deeply rooted in the argot of the urban poor, introduces a subversive linguistic energy that destabilizes dominant cultural hierarchies. Through its dialogic structure, *Film-Farsi* thus becomes a site where multiple ideological positions coexist and contest one another, producing what Bakhtin termed the "carnavalesque inversion" of social order.

In synthesis, these theoretical frameworks collectively enable a reading of the *daš mašti* not merely as a character type but as a semiotic and ideological formation. Through the interplay of syntagmatic structure (Metz 1974), multi-level signification (Barthes 1977), ideological materiality of signs (Voloshinov 1973), and dialogic multiplicity (Bakhtin 1981), the *daš mašti* emerges as a locus of cultural negotiation, a cinematic embodiment of Iran's conflicted encounter with modernity, morality, and identity.

5. Historical and Cultural Context: The *Daš Mašti* and *Film-Farsi*

The *daš mašti* archetype is not merely a folkloric construct but a historically sedimented cultural formation rooted in the moral and linguistic universe of Iran's urban lower classes. Its origins can be traced to the working-class quarters of southern Tehran, particularly the districts of Sangelaj, Pamenar, and Rey, where neighborhood solidarity, *pahlavāni* (heroic athleticism), and the ethics of *javanmardi* (manly virtue) coalesced into a distinct urban code of conduct. Emerging during the late Qajar and early Pahlavi periods, the *daš mašti* represented a subcultural identity structured around three key virtues: *javanmardi* (moral courage and generosity), *morovvat* (chivalric magnanimity), and *namusdāri* (protection of family and communal honor). These ideals combined physical toughness with a moral sensibility that privileged loyalty to one's neighborhood, defense of the weak, and deference to women's chastity, values that were simultaneously ethical, performative, and spatially embedded within the *mahalleh* (urban neighborhood).

The historical lineage of the *daš mašti* reaches back to earlier Persian social institutions such as the *ayyārān* (chivalric adventurers) and the *futuwwat* brotherhoods, whose origins lie in medieval Sufi orders that fused martial discipline with spiritual self-cultivation. The *ayyārān* embodied a proto-national ethos of honor, bravery, and altruism, later transformed into the *futuwwat-nāmeḥ* literature that codified moral and professional conduct for guilds and artisans. As Iran underwent processes of urbanization and modernization during the nineteenth century, these moral ideals were refracted through new socio-economic realities. The *daš mašti* evolved into an ambivalent figure: celebrated as a local protector and moral exemplar, yet also feared as an unruly street tough (*obāsh*, *chāqū-kesh*). This duality, between heroism and delinquency, reflected the contradictions of a rapidly transforming society negotiating the erosion of traditional authority and the incursion of state modernity.

The Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911 marked a critical moment in the politicization of the *daš mašti*. Members of this subcultural milieu were mobilized by rival factions, their allegiances shifting between nationalist reformers and royalist conservatives. Figures such as Shaban Ja'fari (popularly known as Shaban Bi Mokh) epitomized this instrumentalization of urban masculinity, embodying both populist charisma and political opportunism. The 1953 coup d'état further crystallized this dynamic, as *daš maštis* were co-opted by state and clerical powers as enforcers of moral and political order, turning the once-autonomous urban moral code into a performative apparatus of authority.

The emergence of *Film-Farsi* in the 1950s and 1960s provided a crucial cinematic space for the rearticulation of the *daš mašti* mythos within modern mass culture. Often dismissed by critics as a commercialized, formulaic

genre, *Film-Farsi* in fact served as a vital arena for negotiating Iran's cultural anxieties regarding authenticity, modernity, and class identity. Within this cinematic matrix, the *daš mašti* was reimagined as a morally complex yet charismatic hero, an urban paladin whose rustic ethics contrasted sharply with the effete and Westernized *fokoli* (urban dandy). The *fokoli-daš mašti* opposition thus functioned as a central semiotic binary, dramatizing the broader tension between local cultural integrity and Western cultural intrusion.

In films such as *Qaysar* (Masoud Kimiai, 1969) and *Daš Akol* (Masoud Kimiai, 1971), the *daš mašti* emerged as a locus of moral resistance within a society perceived as corrupted by consumerism and moral decay. Kimiai's cinematic language transformed the archetype from a folkloric remnant into a tragic modern hero, caught between loyalty to traditional codes and the inevitability of social change. His sartorial markers (felt hat, dark suit, dagger), performative gestures (controlled aggression, stylized gait), and linguistic register (vernacular Tehran dialect) together produce a cinematic semiotics of authenticity. These embodied signs function as what Roland Barthes would call *mythologies*, codes that naturalize ideological meaning by fusing moral virtue with cultural nostalgia.

The *daš mašti*'s continued resonance within Iranian cultural memory underscores its ideological elasticity. At once a product of the urban underclass and a moral emblem appropriated by national culture, it occupies a liminal position between myth and modernity. Through the cinematic mediation of *Film-Farsi*, the *daš mašti* becomes not only a character type but also a moral discourse, a site where Iranian modernity confronts its own ethical and historical contradictions.

6. Linguistic Features of the *Daš Mašti* Vernacular

The linguistic identity of the *daš mašti* represents a central semiotic dimension of his cinematic construction and social intelligibility. Far from being a neutral vehicle of communication, the *daš mašti*'s speech functions as a highly codified sociolect, one that simultaneously delineates class belonging, moral orientation, and affective stance. As a product of Tehran's southern districts, this vernacular variety diverges markedly from the standardized register of Persian associated with education, bureaucracy, and the cultural elite. Phonologically, it features consonantal simplifications and vowel reductions that index informality and immediacy; morphologically, it employs diminutive and emphatic suffixes that convey affective intensity; syntactically, it favors parataxis and repetition over subordination, creating a rhythm of orality that mirrors street discourse. Lexically, it incorporates argot (*zabān-e kuče*) terms and idiomatic expressions specific to male camaraderie, local honor codes, and neighborhood solidarity.

In sociolinguistic terms, this speech pattern operates as what (Eckert 2008: 67) defines as an “indexical field”: a constellation of semiotic resources that evoke specific social meanings through recurrent linguistic forms. Within this field, the *daš mašti*’s vernacular indexes authenticity, masculinity, and emotional integrity, positioning him in opposition to the effeminate, foreignized speech of the *fokoli*. Such indexicality is performative in the Butlerian sense, it does not merely represent identity but actively constitutes it through repeated linguistic acts. Each utterance, laden with colloquial humor, hyperbole, and moral invocation, becomes an enactment of *javanmardi* (manly virtue) and *morovvat* (chivalric decency).

The performative force of the *daš mašti*’s language is further accentuated by its cinematic mediation. On screen, dialect becomes an auditory signifier of social and moral geography. Directors such as Masoud Kimiai, Ali Hatami, and Davoud Mollapour exploited the expressive power of vernacular speech to encode authenticity and emotional proximity. The *daš mašti*’s dialect not only situates him within the urban underclass but also functions as a moral chronotope, a temporal and spatial condensation of pre-modern ethical values recontextualized in modern cinematic language. Through intonation, pacing, and idiomatic turns of phrase, the *daš mašti*’s speech conveys sincerity and honor in a way that the polished enunciation of the bourgeois characters cannot.

In semiotic terms, the *daš mašti*’s sociolect functions as a system of what Bakhtin (1981:89) would call *heteroglossia*, wherein language becomes a site of ideological struggle between competing voices. Within *Film-Farsi*, the coexistence of the *daš mašti*’s colloquial register and the standard Persian of the elite generates a dialogic tension that dramatizes class conflict and cultural duality. This heteroglossic interaction transforms the filmic dialogue into a linguistic battleground where moral and social hierarchies are both articulated and contested. The *daš mašti*’s voice thus acquires metonymic significance: it stands for the voice of the subaltern, the vernacular conscience of the nation, resisting the homogenizing pressures of modernity and Westernization.

Ultimately, the linguistic repertoire of the *daš mašti* operates as both a marker of social identity and a cinematic trope of authenticity. Its stylized realism bridges the gap between folklore and film, oral culture and visual narrative. In the symbolic economy of *Film-Farsi*, to speak like a *daš mašti* is to embody a moral language of belonging, a language in which pronunciation, rhythm, and idiom become the very texture of virtue and resistance. Viewed through the combined lenses of semiotics, sociolinguistics, and film theory, the *daš mašti*’s linguistic performance emerges as a crucial site where cinematic form and social ideology intersect: in the sense proposed by (Metz 1974: 67), his speech operates as a syntagmatic unit within the filmic

discourse, a narrative sign whose relational position constructs meaning beyond its immediate dialogue, while Voloshinov's (1973: 146) insight that "every sign is an arena of class struggle" finds concrete manifestation in the way the *daš mašti*'s vernacular becomes a socially charged sign that materializes ideology in the texture of speech itself.

6.1 Phonological Variation

The phonological profile of *daš mašti* speech constitutes one of the most salient markers of its semiotic distinctiveness within Iranian popular culture. Phonological variation here operates not merely as a linguistic deviation from the standard but as a socially meaningful stylistic practice that encodes masculinity, locality, and authenticity. The most prominent feature is vowel raising before nasal consonants, where long /a:/ and mid /o/ shift to /u/, as in *na:n* → *nun* and *pahlevān* → *pahlevun*. Although this process occurs sporadically across many colloquial Persian varieties, its systematic and exaggerated deployment in *daš mašti* speech functions as a socio-indexical signal of in-group solidarity. It marks the speaker's affiliation with the urban vernacular of southern Tehran while simultaneously rejecting the phonological precision associated with formal or bourgeois registers.

Equally notable is the tendency toward vowel and syllable deletion, exemplified in forms such as *dadašešim* (from *dadaše u hastim*), where contraction and lengthening occur within a single prosodic unit; *eštebāh* → *ešteb* ("mistake"); and *daghighē* → *daghghe* ("minute"). Note that this last pair of examples is a phonological rather than a morphological process in the strict sense: what is deleted is an internal vowel and syllable boundary, not a grammatical formative, so the word's category and argument structure are unaffected, even though the resulting form is shorter. This feature compresses the phonological shape of the word, producing what might be termed a "rhythmic contraction" that characterizes the oral performance of *daš mašti* identity. The alternation between contraction and vowel lengthening within the same phonological space generates a distinctive prosodic rhythm, one that conveys emotional immediacy, intimacy, and controlled aggression. These phonetic gestures align with the performative dimension of *daš mašti* masculinity, where rhythm, tone, and pacing carry as much semiotic weight as lexical content.

Consonantal variation further amplifies the distinctiveness of this register. Processes such as metathesis (*Ghofl* → *Gholf*), voicing alternation, and final consonant elision (*mast* → *mas*, *gušt* → *guš*) reflect a dynamic phonological economy aimed at communicative efficiency and oral fluidity. The frequent deletion of /h/, as in *Mehdi* → *Mehti* → *Meyti*, parallels similar elision patterns in other colloquial dialects but acquires distinct social meaning in the *daš mašti* context due to its consistency and performative emphasis. The

resulting phonetic texture, dense, rhythmic, and throaty, constructs a recognizable auditory icon of working-class speech.

The prosodic dimension of *daš mašti* speech is particularly revealing in its indexical function. Native speakers often describe this speech style as *bād dar gelu andākhtan* (“placing weight in the throat”), a vocal posture that produces a lowered pitch and guttural resonance. This phonation type operates as a form of embodied semiotics: the physical act of speaking “from the throat” iconically represents strength, confidence, and defiance. The effect is one of assertive masculinity, what (Irvine and Gal 2000: 56) might term an “iconization” of gendered and social attributes through linguistic form. In cinematic representation, such vocal stylization serves as an auditory cue that instantly anchors the *daš mašti* character within his social and moral universe.

From a linguistic anthropological perspective, the *daš mašti* phonological style exemplifies what Silverstein (2003: 92) terms a “second-order index”, a higher-level metapragmatic association through which phonetic features come to signify ideological and affective meanings. The low, resonant voice and modified vowel patterns do not merely signal regional or class identity; they perform moral authenticity and virile integrity. In this sense, phonology functions as a site where cultural ideology becomes acoustically materialized. The *daš mašti*’s speech thus bridges the gap between linguistic form and social performance, between sound and ethics, making phonological variation a vital semiotic resource in the cinematic articulation of Iranian masculinity.

6.2 Morphological and Lexical Innovations

Morphological variation constitutes one of the most salient linguistic features that differentiates the *daš mašti* vernacular from standard Persian. Beyond the phonological reductions discussed in Section 6.1 above, which shorten a word’s phonological shape without altering its grammatical category, *daš mašti* speech also reflects a genuinely morphological tendency toward creative restructuring, most clearly seen in the reduplication patterns discussed below. This process functions as a marker of in-group identity: it is not merely a matter of articulation efficiency but a semiotic strategy of solidarity, signaling shared familiarity and resistance to the formalism of standard Persian. Such forms are rarely encountered in other Tehrani sociolects, underscoring the *daš mašti* register’s status as a restricted linguistic code, a term borrowed from Basil Bernstein’s (1971) sociolinguistic typology, referring to language varieties that reinforce communal intimacy and social cohesion.

Another recurrent morphological and stylistic device is reduplication and *etbā* (a playful repetition or consonantal alteration). In *daš mašti* discourse,

reduplication often serves to amplify meaning, create rhythmic emphasis, or convey irony and ridicule. Examples such as *nun mun* (“bread and similar things”), *derakht merakht* (“trees and the like”), and *chert o pert* or *kharj barj* (“nonsense”) demonstrate how sound patterning becomes an instrument of expressivity. These paired structures, while semantically light, perform important pragmatic and affective functions: they dramatize speech, signal emotional stance, and animate everyday conversation with performative energy. In this respect, *daš mašti* reduplication mirrors oral traditions of popular Persian storytelling and street performance, where rhythm and repetition heighten memorability and audience engagement.

The lexical repertoire of the *daš mašti* register further underscores its role as an urban argot, a coded vocabulary used to demarcate insiders from outsiders. Lexical items such as *dokhmal* (for *dokhtar*, “girl”), *tilif* (“telephone”), *tilgherab* (“telegraph”), and *otol* (“automobile”) exemplify a blend of phonological adaptation, truncation, and parody of foreign loans. Such playful manipulations simultaneously domesticate modern or foreign terms and reassert linguistic autonomy in the face of modernization and Westernization pressures during early twentieth-century Tehran. On the surface, these transformations appear humorous or whimsical; yet, beneath their comic veneer lies a sociopolitical dimension, a linguistic resistance to elitist norms and a celebration of vernacular creativity as cultural capital.

Equally significant is the idiomatic dimension of *daš mašti* speech, which encodes moral and behavioral frameworks specific to this subcultural milieu. Expressions like *tigh keshidan* (“self-wounding for deceit”), *tigh zadan* (“taking money deceitfully”), *ketf band kardan* (“defeating someone physically”), and *gardun amadan* (“acting boldly or assertively”) operate as condensed moral signifiers. They encapsulate a distinct ethical system rooted in *javanmardi*—the chivalric code of masculinity, courage, and honor, as well as the pragmatics of streetwise cunning. In these idioms, lexical economy fuses with symbolic density, allowing short, colloquial phrases to convey layered meanings about power, trust, and reputation. Thus, the *daš mašti* lexicon emerges not merely as slang, but as a moral-linguistic system that articulates the social values and behavioral expectations of its speakers.

6.3 Syntax and Pragmatic Markers

The *daš mašti* speech style is characterized by a marked preference for short, paratactic constructions over complex syntactic embedding. This tendency toward syntactic simplicity and clause chaining reflects both the oral foundation of the register and its emphasis on immediacy and emotional transparency. In *daš mašti* discourse, meaning unfolds through a succession of brief, self-contained utterances—each delivered with rhythm and force rather than through hypotactic subordination typical of formal or

literary Persian. Such syntactic economy does not indicate linguistic deficiency; rather, it serves a functional and stylistic purpose: to foreground the speaker's presence and authority, to maintain conversational tempo, and to facilitate audience engagement in both spontaneous street interaction and cinematic representation. This preference for parataxis over subordination is consistent with a broader tendency in colloquial spoken Persian, where subordination is comparatively rare and clauses are more often juxtaposed than hypotactically embedded (Windfuhr and Perry 2009: 445–448); the *daš mašti* register can be read as intensifying, rather than departing from, this general colloquial pattern. Three concrete patterns illustrate the point. Subject and copula are frequently omitted where context recovers them, as in *nemixām* for *man nemixām*, “[I] don’t want [it]”; finite clauses are chained with a bare *va* (“and”) or simply juxtaposed rather than subordinated, as in *raftam, didamesh, zadam*, “I went, I saw him, I hit [him],” where three finite clauses stand in sequence with no connective; and vocative or imperative tags are frequently placed after, rather than embedded within, the main clause, as in *boro, baba, boro!*, “go on, man, go!,” where the address term *baba* interrupts the syntax rather than modifying it.

In cinematic dialogue, this brevity enhances performativity. Because *daš mašti* speech often relies on intonation, rhythm, and gesture as communicative vehicles, syntactic compression allows these nonverbal modalities to assume greater semiotic weight. In other words, when a *daš mašti* character delivers a line, its full communicative force is carried not solely by verbal content but also by prosody, facial expression, and bodily stance. This interplay between linguistic minimalism and physical expressivity aligns with the performative traditions of Tehran’s popular culture, particularly the *ru-hozi* theater and street performance, where dialogue functions as a vehicle of embodiment and moral assertion rather than abstract narration.

From a pragmatic perspective, *daš mašti* discourse is rich in repetition, interjections, and diminutive honorifics, which collectively construct the register’s affective and relational tone. Repetitive patterns (e.g., *baba, baba!* or *befarma, befarma*) serve as emphatic and rhythmic devices, reinforcing urgency, persuasion, or affection. Interjections such as *boro baba!* (“come on!” or “get out of here!”) function as stance-taking markers, expressing emotional evaluation and managing interpersonal boundaries. The frequent use of honorific diminutives such as *-jun* and *-am* (*maman-jun, dada-am*) indexes solidarity, affection, and emotional involvement, softening potentially confrontational exchanges and reaffirming social bonds within the masculine ethics of *javanmardi*.

Linguistically, these pragmatic features operate as what Du Bois (2007) conceptualizes as “stance markers”, elements through which speakers

position themselves, evaluate others, and construct social identity. The *daš mašti* stance, in this framework, is both performative and moralistic: it foregrounds directness, protection, loyalty, and honor as key components of social identity. Speech becomes an enactment of ethical posture rather than mere information exchange. This performative stance also aligns closely with the *daš mašti* cinematic persona, figures whose speech and gesture communicate *javanmardi* values through tone, timing, and bodily expressivity.

In cinematic contexts, such pragmatic strategies play a crucial role in audience comprehension and emotional response. The combination of syntactic economy, rhythmic repetition, and affective intonation ensures that meaning is conveyed through sound, movement, and relational cues as much as through lexical content. The *daš mašti* way of speaking, therefore, embodies a semiotic totality, a fusion of linguistic, prosodic, and gestural signs that together project a coherent cultural identity. It exemplifies how language, in the urban popular sphere, functions as performance: a tool for asserting moral authority, emotional authenticity, and social solidarity within a visually and aurally mediated space.

7. Semiotic Analysis of Filmic Representation

Film, as (Christian Metz 1974: 143) famously argued, operates through the syntagmatic organization of visual and auditory signs, each functioning like a unit within a broader cinematic “language.” Meaning in film thus emerges not from isolated images or sounds, but from their combinatory sequence, where narrative, editing, sound, and gesture coalesce to form a coherent semiotic structure. Within this framework, the *Film-Farsi* tradition of the 1950s–1970s offers a particularly rich site for analyzing how linguistic, visual, and musical codes work together to construct social and moral archetypes. Among these, the *daš mašti* figure stands out as a mythic condensation of urban masculinity, a hybrid of the street-wise hero, the protector of the weak, and the moral voice of the lower classes.

The *daš mašti* is not merely represented as a character; he is semiotically produced through a dense network of interrelated codes. Visually, his identity is established through a recognizable iconography, rolled sleeves, open collars, moustaches, prayer beads, or the *kolāh makhmali* hat, signifiers that connote strength, humility, and virile authenticity. Musically, his presence is often accompanied by traditional melodies, *tasnif*-like motifs, or street songs, anchoring him in the auditory world of the bazaar and the alleyway. Linguistically, the *daš mašti* register, replete with paratactic syntax, repetition, and moral idioms, functions as the primary vehicle for articulating his ethical stance. Together, these semiotic layers form a

syntagmatic chain that encodes both class identity and moral ideology, translating social values into aesthetic experience.

Through this interlocking system of signs, *Film-Farsi* constructs the *daš mašti* not simply as a narrative agent but as a symbolic structure, a site where competing cultural discourses, modernization and tradition, virtue and violence, authenticity and artifice, are negotiated. His language, gestures, and music are indexical signs of resistance against cultural alienation and social hierarchy, offering audiences a recognizable moral framework within the rapidly modernizing urban landscape of pre-revolutionary Iran. The *daš mašti* thus functions as a mythic mediator, embodying what Roland Barthes (1977) might call the “naturalization” of ideology: the transformation of social struggle into narrative pleasure, and of vernacular expression into cinematic heroism.

7.1 Visual Codes and Costume Semiotics

The costume of the *daš mašti* operates as a visual sign system derived from the *haft parcheh* tradition, seven emblematic items associated with urban chivalry: the felt hat (*kolah namadi*), long coat (*ghaba*), Yazd handkerchief (*dastmale Yazdi*), dagger (*ghameh*), brass bowl (*jam*), chain (*zanjir*), and handwoven shoes (*giveh*).

Over time, cinematic adaptation modernized these symbols: the *ghaba* transformed into a black suit, the *kolah namadi* into a velvet hat (*kolah makhmali*), and the dagger became a concealed switchblade. This semiotic modernization reflects a paradigmatic shift in Iranian urban identity, preserving the moral essence of *javanmardi* while embedding it within contemporary social realities.

This modernization was not a single, uniform shift but unfolded across the two decades under discussion here. Early *Film-Farsi* of the 1950s retained much of the *haft parcheh* silhouette relatively intact, presenting the *jahel* in loose traditional dress recognizable from earlier popular theater. By the 1960s, the figure sometimes labeled the *jahel-e kolāh-makhmali* had become more codified: an oversized, Western-cut suit worn in place of the *ghaba*, the velvet hat replacing the felt one, and the *giveh* increasingly giving way to polished leather shoes, a combination that marks the character as urban and modernizing even as his speech and conduct remain tied to older neighborhood codes (Moridi and Shahvaroughi Farahani 2023: 42–44). By the *Qaysar–Daš Akol* moment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Kimiai’s direction compresses this costume system further: the *ghaba* becomes a plain black suit or open-collared shirt, the dagger a concealed switchblade, and the hat is frequently dropped altogether in favor of bare-headed, open-shirted dishevelment at moments of violence or emotional exposure, a

stripping-away of ornament that can be read as shifting the locus of authenticity from costume to body.

Physical appearance and grooming operate as a parallel sign system. The moustache, worn full and untrimmed, functions as a conventional marker of the *javanmard*'s maturity and virility, in contrast to the clean-shaven or thin-moustached *fokoli*; hair is typically kept short and unstyled, again in visual opposition to the *fokoli*'s pomaded, Westernized coiffure. Gait and stance carry comparable semiotic weight: a rolling, deliberately unhurried walk, rolled-up sleeves, and an open collar recur across the *daš mašti* corpus as visual shorthand for readiness and lack of pretension. Such embodied gesture can be treated, following Kendon's (2004: 1–7) account of gesture as a structured, culturally conventionalized sign system in its own right, as a semiotic channel operating alongside costume and speech rather than as incidental behavior; Section 7.3 below discusses one such gesture, the pre-fight "raising of the heel," as a case of this kinesic signification. Taken together, costume, grooming, gait, gesture, and music form a redundant, mutually reinforcing sign cluster in which no single channel alone carries the full weight of characterization.

The moment a *daš mašti* enters a scene is often marked by the auditory cue of *zurkhaneh* music, a traditional gym melody associated with spiritual strength and masculine ritual. This music acts as an *indexical sign* signaling that the *javanmard*, the man of virtue, is about to appear. The synchronization of gesture, music, and costume constructs an intersemiotic cohesion that situates the *daš mašti* within both mythic and cinematic dimensions.

7.2 Qaysar (1969): Mythic Heroism and Moral Semiotics

Masoud Kimiai's *Qaysar* remains the quintessential cinematic articulation of the *daš mašti*. The film's title sequence introduces its semiotic structure even before the narrative begins: images of *Shahnameh* heroes tattooed on Qaysar's body appear alongside the credits, linking the protagonist to Iran's epic tradition. The juxtaposition of Qaysar's name with Sohrab's portrait and the *Arab-o-Ajam* battle imagery implies an underlying dichotomy of good versus evil, courage versus treachery.

As (Barthes 1977: 83) might suggest, these images form a "mythology" in which the *daš mašti* body becomes a text inscribed with cultural memory. Qaysar's subsequent actions, avenging his sister's dishonor, translate mythic heroism into urban morality. The film's *mise-en-scène* alternates between *zurkhaneh* interiors and modern streets, signifying the tension between tradition and modernity.

The scene where Qaysar's uncle reads the *Shahnameh* while Qaysar confesses to murder exemplifies the intertextual layering of epic and moral

codes. The dialogue's linguistic simplicity contrasts with the elevated literary allusions, creating what Bakhtin (1981: 25) would term a "dialogic intersection" between popular and high discourses.

7.3 *Daš Akol* (1971): Tragic Masculinity and Linguistic Duality

In *Daš Akol*, Kimiai continues the exploration of *daš mašti* morality through tragedy. The protagonist, torn between love and honor, speaks in a restrained vernacular infused with proverbs and elliptical phrases. His speech embodies the balance between silence and expression, reflecting the *daš mašti*'s moral restraint.

The climactic *ta'ziyeh* scene, depicting the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, operates as a meta-semiotic commentary: the religious passion play mirrors the *daš mašti*'s fatal duel. The overlap of sacred and profane discourses situates the *daš mašti* within Iran's broader cultural semiotics of sacrifice and redemption.

Kimiai's paradigmatic choices, such as associating *zurkhaneh* imagery with acts of vengeance, encode moral hierarchies visually. The act of "raising the heel" (*pashneye pa ra bala keshidan*) before a fight is a recurrent gesture that signals the imminence of action, a *syntagmatic cue* recognizable to Iranian audiences. It functions as a *kinetic signifier*, analogous to a linguistic morpheme signaling grammatical aspect (intention, imminence).

8. Discussion: Language, Ideology, and Masculine Performance

The *daš mašti*'s linguistic and semiotic construction reveals the intersection of language, ideology, and gender performance in pre-revolutionary Iran. His speech embodies the working-class morality of *namusdari* (protection of honor) and *morovvat* (generosity), opposing the corrupt elite represented by *fokolis*.

Through linguistic stylization, filmmakers transform everyday vernacular into a symbolic language of authenticity. The phonological roughness and lexical creativity of *daš mašti* speech produce an auditory realism that aligns with the visual codes of physical strength and moral clarity. This is consistent with Halliday's (1978: 33) conception of register as a "semiotic potential" through which social meanings are enacted.

Moreover, the *daš mašti*'s vernacular serves as resistance against linguistic standardization imposed by modernizing elites. The subcultural speech acts as what Bourdieu (1991:167) terms a "counter-capital" in the linguistic market, asserting working-class prestige through distinct style. In cinema, this resistance becomes aestheticized, creating a populist discourse that resonates emotionally with audiences while reaffirming traditional values.

The semiotic layering of language, gesture, and costume constructs masculinity as both moral and performative. The *daš mašti*'s manliness (*mardanegi*) is not innate but enacted through linguistic choices and ritualized gestures. As Connell (1995: 23) notes, masculinity is a "configuration of practice," and in *Film-Farsi*, these practices manifest linguistically, through assertive tone, controlled syntax, and proverbs emphasizing loyalty and courage.

9. Conclusion

The *daš mašti* in pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema represents far more than a recurring character type; he is a linguistic-semiotic construct through which evolving notions of morality, masculinity, and class identity are articulated and contested. His presence reveals how cinema can function as a mediating space between language and ideology, transforming spoken registers into visual myths. By integrating the frameworks of film semiotics (Metz, 1974: 49) and sociolinguistic theory, this study has shown that the *daš mašti*'s distinctive linguistic behavior, phonological shifts such as vowel raising and truncation, morphological economy, lexical innovation, and idiomatic density, forms a structured system of social signs. These linguistic features index solidarity, authenticity, and moral resistance, marking the speaker as part of an urban subculture that simultaneously affirms and subverts dominant social hierarchies.

From a semiotic perspective, the *daš mašti*'s speech exemplifies the process of enregisterment (Agha, 2007:21), whereby a particular set of linguistic forms becomes recognizable as a socially meaningful style. What begins as local street vernacular in south Tehran is recontextualized in *Film-Farsi* as a cinematic sociolect, carrying ideological resonance across visual and auditory domains. Directors such as Masoud Kimiai, Ali Hatami, and Samouel Khachikian performed what can be termed an intersemiotic translation, transforming linguistic signs into non-verbal cinematic codes: *zurkhaneh* music and chants, ritualized gestures of loyalty, the choreography of confrontation, and the mythic mise-en-scène of the alleyway. Through this translation, *daš mašti* speech transcended language to become a symbolic soundscape of urban morality and resistance.

While *Film-Farsi* often appeared as mere popular entertainment, it in fact operated as a complex semiotic system, one that mediated Iran's uneasy passage from traditional moral structures to modern urban modernity. The decline of *Film-Farsi* after 1974 signaled not only a stylistic shift but the erasure of a linguistic world-view. Yet, traces of the *daš mašti* idiom, its intonation patterns, slang expressions, and pragmatic formulas, continue to circulate within contemporary Iranian popular culture. They resurface in post-revolutionary media discourse, street vernaculars, and Persian rap

music, where echoes of the same moral register, honor, defiance, authenticity, are reimagined in new sociopolitical contexts.

Future research may explore how this linguistic heritage of the *daš mašti* evolves within post-revolutionary Iran's changing media landscape. Such inquiry would not only document the transformation of a speech style but also reveal how language, ideology, and performance remain intertwined in the production of Iranian urban identities. The *daš mašti*, though absent as a cinematic figure, endures linguistically, as rhythm, intonation, and stance, continuing to index a moral world that modern Iran has both outgrown and never entirely left behind.

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