

A first account of the languages in western Hormozgan*

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Hormozgan Province of south-western Iran is a rich, but for the most part little-explored venue for linguistic studies. In this paper we offer an initial overview of languages and linguistic structures in the western half of the province based on two weeks of fieldwork conducted there between in December 2016 and January 2017. This research is part of a large-scale study of languages and dialects in Hormozgan Province within the framework of the *Atlas of the Languages of Iran* programme (ALI 2017). The data for this phase of the project were gathered from 12 research sites¹ through a comprehensive questionnaire developed for the description of language variation in Iran (available at: <http://carleton.ca/iran/questionnaires/>) plus high-quality video and audio recordings of texts in various genres. Our selection of research sites was based on the initial global assessment of language distribution in Hormozgan province carried out in 2015 by Mohebbi Bahmani et al.

Western Hormozgan is characterized by a high degree of linguistic diversity, the result of population movements that have taken place repeatedly over past decades and centuries. The Southwestern Iranian variety Lārestāni (locally known as “Achomi”) is the dominant language in the area; and the Southwestern variety Dashti, which is similar to the “Fars” dialects of southern Fars Province and Bushehr Province, is spoken at the western extremity of the Province. Other important language groups include Arabic along much of the coast; the Koroshi dialect of Southern Balochi in scattered locations; and the Indo-Aryan language Kholosi (first reported by Rashidi in Anonby & Mohebbi Bahmani 2014) is spoken in two villages.

Our initial investigations of the questionnaires provide a first account of linguistic and sociolinguistic features across the west of the province. The collected data reveal a number of salient characteristics as follows:

- Gāvandini, Buchiri, Hashnizi, Chahvāzi, Rostāqi, Jamsi, Farāmarzi, Kemesheki, Koshkonāri, Bastaki, Sheykhān and Ruydari are the main varieties of Achomi in western Hormozgan.
- Although all the languages in Iran are generally under the direct influence of standard Persian, the level of language endangerment is not invariant in this region. Compared to the other language varieties in the western part of the province, Parsian (Gav Bandi), Fumestan, Milaki and Ehsham² (All Gāvandini speakers) are now more Persianized and a clear language shift from Gāvandini into Standard Persian is gradually occurring.
- The ergative-absolutive construction is the noticeable feature of verbal forms in Achomi languages. This form occurs in the past form of transitive verbs. For example, the simple past form of the verb ‘hit’ in Buchiri is conjugated as *omza* 1sg, *otza* 2sg, *oŝza* 3sg, *munza* 1pl, *tunza*

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¹. Research locations: Dashti, Buchir, Fumestan, Rostaq, Chahvaz, Hashniz, Bastak, Janah, Morbagh, Kharabeh, Bandar Moqam and Kholos.

². Ehsham is now part of Parsian city.

2pl, *šunza* 3pl. But the simple past form of the verb ‘sleep’ – as an intransitive verb – is conjugated as *xatom* 1sg, *xateš* 2sg, *xat* 3sg, *xatedem* 1pl, *xatedi* 2pl, *xateden* 3pl.

- Nasalization does exist among Achomi languages. For example, in Buchir the words ‘tongue’ and ‘hair’ are pronounced as *ezbũ* and *mĩ*, respectively. However, it sounds allophonic rather than a phonemic nasalized vowel.
- In contrast to languages further north in the Zagros mountain range, which reaches western Hormozgan, we did not observe any examples of “Zagros d” [ð]” (Windfuhr 2009) in the languages of this area. In this form, *d* is softened intervocalically and in final position of the words.
- It seems that the voiced uvular consonant of *G* in standard Persian is produced as a voiceless uvular stop *q*, a voiced uvular fricative *ġ* [ʁ], a voiceless uvular fricative *x* [χ] and/or velar stops of *k* & *g*. For example, *ġāli* ‘carpet’, *kāšox* ‘spoon’, *kadim* ‘past’, *gahva* ‘coffee’, *morx* ‘chicken’ etc.
- *darkā*, *dakā*, *daku* and *kar* are the common particles to show the incomplete aspect in past and present tenses. For example, the present continuous form of the verb ‘see’ in Rostaq is conjugated as *dakā abonom* 1sg, *dakā aboneš* 2sg, *dakā abu* 3sg, *dakā anbonen* 1pl, *dakā aboni* 2pl, *dakā abonen* 3pl.
- The variation in the lexicon is observed in the languages of the region, as well. Among eighty lexical items in the questionnaire, the word ‘house’ has been used as *srā* (Achomi, Janah), *xuno*, *serā* (Achomi, Bastak), *luġ* (Koroshi, Morbagh), *xuna* (Achomi, Hashniz), *zuna* (Achomi, Buchir), *xuna* (Dashti, Dashti), *xuna* (Achomi, Rostaq), *xune* (Achomi, Chahvaz), *bēf* [be:f] (Arabic, Bandar Moqam) and *ge* (Kholosi, Kholos).

Although it is only a beginning, and touches only on salient aspects of the data, this paper gives a first scholarly overview of the language varieties and noteworthy linguistic structures in the western part of Hormozgan province. To bring this same depth of coverage to the whole province, the author and colleagues in the ALI team for Hormozgan will continue working on these topics over the next year, in a second round of fieldwork for the many languages and dialect groups in the central and eastern districts of the province.

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