

Gavruni (also called Gabri or Zoroastrian Dari) is the language spoken by the Zoroastrians of Yazd; it was also the language of the Zoroastrians of Kerman until it gradually fell out of use among them during the second part of the twentieth century. It has been studied since 1853 (BERÉSINE 1853) classified as a Central (Western) dialect by WINDFUHR 1989. Recent work on this language includes a book by GHOLAMI AND FARAHMAND book on the Kermāni dialect which was published in 2016.

Apart from very peculiar lexical features, and a rich dialectalisation (around 30 dialects and subdialects, cf GHOLAMI 2016), the grammar of the Gavruni language is of particular interest for Iranian studies, especially its verb system. In the present study I will focus on showing how Gavruni modals work and compare them with modals in other Western Iranian languages. The corpora used will be the Niknam corpus (recorded in Yazd in the 1990s) and my own corpus recorded in Yazd in 2015, referred to as BERNARD , along with the paradigms presented in MAZDAPOUR 1995.

I. Modal verbs in Gavruni

Instead of using conjugated verbs to express obligation (I should), wishes, (I want), ability (I can) and possibility (I may) Gavruni uses frozen 3rd person preterite forms of modal verbs, for example:

(1) *me* *me='o(t)* *unig-e*
 I 1SG.=want sit-1SG

“I want to sit” (MAZDAPOUR 1995 p. 128)

(2) *mɔ* *mo='o(t)* *unig-im*
 we 1PL.=want sit-1PL

“we want to sit”(MAZDAPOUR 1995 p. 128)

(3) *yɔra* *om=ve' o* *vɔ(te)*
 INTERR. 1SG.=shall say.PRET

“Should I say (that)?” (MAZDAPOUR 1995 p. 135)

(4) *ager* *kotak* *de=ā^o* *piš* *or-e*
 if hitting 2SG.=want near=2SG.CL bring.PRS-1SG

“If you want a blow, I'll bring (you) near (me)” (BERNARD)

MALCHUKOV & OGAWA 2011 (p.50) write “[...] different varieties of impersonal constructions reflect the loss of functional subject properties (such as definiteness, topicality and agentivity)”. I will try to see how this applies to Gavruni modals, especially by comparing this modal marking with that of surrounding languages, for instance the “Kermāni dialects” as described by LECOQ 2002.

I will present sentences with different modals, then discuss their origin: they are impersonal constructions, originating from a dative or other case-marked construction, something similar to “to you there is a want”, with “you” being a non-canonical subject (cf SIWIERSKA 2011). After the loss of case marking in Gavruni, the “non-canonicity” is only reflected by the fact that the formal subject is represented by a proclitic (originally an oblique case form) in modal constructions.

II. Other impersonal constructions in Gavruni

Other impersonal constructions in Gavruni include (5) and (6), lit. “it was my good”, meaning “I liked it”, “you liked it”, with an original sense of “it was good (to me)”. This is comparable to the New Persian use of the (originally) 3rd singular *šāyad* and

bāyad: *šāyad* means “perhaps” and is diachronically the 3rd sg. of the present stem of the verb *šāyestan* “to be able, to be worthy”, and *bāyad* means “must” as in *bāyad beravam* “I must go”, and is the 3rd pers. sg. of the present stem of *bāyestan* “shall, must”.

Another example of impersonal construction in Gavrouni is represented by the sentence (7) where “to remember” can be expressed by the phrase “Subj. + *vir* + “to be” conjugated”. The verb *virođvun* (or *virodvun*) is a defective verb (see (8)), only conjugated in the past, even with a present meaning, which might explain why the impersonal construction can be used as an alternative.

- (5) *xaš* *mε* *bo*
 well 1sg be.pret.3sg
 “I liked it” (BERNARD)
- (6) *xaš* *tā* *bo*
 well 2sg be.pret.3sg
 “You liked it” (BERNARD)
- (7) *mε* *vir* *na-ha*
 1sg memory NEG-be.3sg
 “I don't remember” (NIKNAM, BERNARD)
- (8) *mε* *me=vira*
 1sg 1sg=remember.pst
 “I remember (literally “I remembered”)” (BERNARD)

In conclusion I will analyse the rise of these constructions, and open up research possibilities in the comparison of these types of constructions in different related languages.

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