

Editor's Preface

Many languages that are spoken today in Iran will fall silent in the near future. A large number of these languages and dialects have never been recorded or described. Many are at risk of falling out of use as their speakers die or members of younger generations shift to speaking different languages. In many areas of Iran, political, religious and social pressures combine to create situations in which speakers give up their languages and traditional ways of life. These speakers typically shift to primary use of Persian, which, as the dominant language of the country, is widely spoken and associated with social and economic power. The speed of these developments has increased dramatically over the past century. Furthermore, since language is closely linked to culture, when a community loses its language, it also loses a great deal of its cultural heritage and early history, including traditions of ceremonies, rituals, myths, poetry, songs, humor, habits, and oratory. These traditions and cultural habits are frequently replaced by the habits of the dominant community.

In response to these processes of linguistic and cultural loss, a number of activities have been undertaken in recent years. These activities particularly include the support and encouragement of researchers in the documentation and fieldwork of endangered Iranian languages. Until quite recently, research on endangered Iranian languages tended to be conducted within the domains of rather distinct disciplines. A major turning point in this trend took place by bringing scholars from all the regions of the world and from different disciplinary interests to the first International Symposium on Endangered Iranian Languages (ISEIL), held on February 20–21, 2015 at the Institute for Empirical Linguistics at the Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany. The second International Symposium on Endangered Iranian Languages was held on July 8–9, 2016 at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle as part of a cooperative work between the Institute for Empirical Linguistics at the Goethe University of Frankfurt, the Mondes Iranien et Indien (UMR) and Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. The theme of the Symposium allowed for rich and concentrated dialogue to take place among scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds. Some of the subthemes covered by the symposium included the development of an atlas for endangered Iranian languages and dialect maps; new methods, controversies, and solutions concerning the documentation of endangered Iranian languages; and philology, morphology, phonology, syntax, as well as dialectology of endangered Iranian languages.

The present volume is a collection of selected articles based on papers given at ISEIL 2016. The papers were substantially enlarged and revised for this volume. The title of the volume, “Endangered Iranian Languages”, is interpreted here rather broadly to refer to endangered Iranian languages and dialects found both inside Iran as well as in other countries.

The purpose of this collection is to present the contributors' findings on these endangered Iranian languages. Their work deals with a variety of topics ranging from documentation methods, to aspects of philology, morphology, phonology, and syntax as well as dialectology.

Dabir-Moghaddam's article deals with the over a century-old debate on the genesis of ergativity in the Iranian languages. He provides examples from a number of endangered Modern Iranian languages with split-agreement systems that also contain an array of constructions with intransitive and two-place verbs but, like transitive past tense stems, use pronominal clitics to encode a core NP as Oblique and encode the other core NP as Direct. Donald Stilo's article is a study of Dikin Marāqei of Alamut, an undocumented conservative Tati language.

The author describes conservative features and innovations of the Tatic family, also found in Marāqei. Dikin Marāqei, spoken in the village of Dikin in Alamut-e Sharqi District (formerly Rudbar-e Alamut District), is one member of the so-called Marāqei group of Tati. Marāqei dialects represent an enclave of the Central Tati type dispersed through some sixteen villages in a wide-spread, mountainous area of Alamut, and as such are completely unexpected for the area. This factor is clearly a result of a population movement from a much more westerly region in Iran, as “Marāqei” implies. The speakers of these varieties only coexist with non-Marāqei Tatoid speakers and have no villages exclusively of their own. These dialects are generally of a highly conservative Tati type and are unintelligible to the neighboring Tatoid varieties even within their own villages.

Werner’s research focuses on variation of the ezafe form, especially as it is found in noun phrases consisting of a masculine head noun plus an adjective. In her article, she presents the forms and distinctions of the independent ezafe (demonstrative) and the dependent ezafe in *Zazaki*. She then introduces the complex noun phrase and examines the ezafe forms according to the relationships in which the noun phrase can appear: nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, and allative.

The article by Obrtelova and Sohibnazarbekova briefly outlines the history of Wakhi language documentation and the attempts to set up a writing system preceding the creation of the Wakhi alphabet in Tajikistan in 2011. Wakhi, an Eastern Iranian minority language in the Pamir area, spread across Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China, has been classified as an unwritten endangered language. The authors discuss in detail the key questions related to the creation of the alphabet, such as the phonetic and phonological complexity of the Wakhi language, arguments for choosing the Cyrillic script, and definition of the basic orthography rules.

Gholami’s article examines the function of pronominal clitics in Zoroastrian Dari of Kerman. The author demonstrates that, in the post-ergative constructions, pronominal enclitics are attached as proclitics and play the role of a subject-verb agreement marker. She shows that the use of the pronominal proclitic as a subject agreement marker is shared by various languages and dialects within Fars (Asiri, Aheli, Xonji, Zeynal-Abadi, Shurabi, Qelati, and Kariyani), Yazd (Zoroastrian Dari and the Jewish Dialect), Kerman (Zoroastrian Dari), and Hormozgan area (Hormozgani).

We are grateful to the Mondes Iranien et Indien (UMR), Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, and particularly to Prof. Dr. Pollet Samvelian, for generously funding the conference. We would also like to thank Dr. Mandana Seyfeddinipur, the director of Endangered Languages Documentations Programme (ELDP), for supporting the conference, the Reichert Verlag for their cooperation and support, and the authors for their articles and for their constructive cooperation throughout the reviewing and editing process.

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