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The Bakhtiaris: an anthropological-linguistic lexical study of Haft Lang nomads of southwestern Iran

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1 INTRODUCTION

The Bakhtiari language has both synchronic and diachronic importance for the study of the Indo-European languages in general and the Iranian languages in Particular. With the exception of Persian, there is no comprehensive description of any southern or southwestern Modern Iranian language. Therefore, a precise description of Bakhtiari by a researcher who combines linguistic schooling with the quality of being a semi-native speaker may be expected to provide a reliable model for future descriptions of other languages in the same continuum.[7]

Historically, Bakhtiari is a descendant of Middle Persian (300 BC– 900 AD) as it was spoken in southwestern Iran, a language that we know fairly well from written sources such as royal inscriptions and legal and religious writings. Bakhtiari still preserves some structures and words which have been lost in the Standard Modern Persian (See 2.3 below). Therefore, the documentation of present-day Bakhtiari, especially in its original usage as a language of (semi-) nomadic people, will yield interesting data for future scholars with historical and/or anthropological linguistic interests.

Having all these concerns in mind, I have designed and focused my study on the morphosyntax and vocabulary of that branch of the Bakhtiari language and culture with which I have more affinity, i.e. the Hamule tribe of the Haft Lang confederation (See 2.2.5 below).

The very few previous efforts that have been made are valuable but they have not managed to avoid all of the pitfalls caused by the unfamiliarity of researchers with some very delicate but critical cultural issues. Besides, the richness of the language and its varieties make it a very valuable historical and structural source for Iranian and Indo-European linguistics at large, and it would be a loss not to provide a solid analysis and description of Bakhtiari before it is too late.

As mentioned above, very little has been done on Bakhtiari so far. The Bakhtiari people and their history came to the attention of western scholars when the probable existence of oil fields in their territory was first reported by military authorities in the beginning of the nineteenth century and again in the early twentieth century. An overview of Bakhtiaris and their involvement in the discovery of oil in Iran (1906-

7. In the course of writing my research two scientific works on the subject were produced: Erik Anonby's book on the phonology of Bakhtiari (2014) and Mohsen Farsani's dissertation (2011) on Bakhtiari vocabulary, both of which will be discussed below in the section on the review of the literature.

09) is provided in the introductory section of the present research (See 2.1 below).

As for the anthropological studies related to the Iranian nomads and their history, a tide of new research on this subject began in the late fifties and sixties. The content of the sparse sources before this new tide can be summarized in Topper's words as below:

> Sources for the history of tribes in Iran are mostly written from a distance by outsiders viewing the tribes with hostility or some other bias. They usually concern such matters as taxation, military levies, disturbances and measures taken to quell them, and more or less inaccurate lists of major tribal groups, numbers and leaders. They rarely deal specifically or in reliable detail with the basic social and economic organization of tribal communities; and they mention individual tribes only when prominent in supporting or opposing government, when involved in inter-tribal disorders, or when transported from one region to another (Tapper 1977: 10).

Since the mid-twentieth century, several Iranian and non-Iranian scholars have done decades of research on different peoples and produced monographs, the most notable ones being: Fredrik Barth (1961), Afshar Naderi (1968); Tapper (1975); Lois Beck (1986; 1991); Erika Freidl (1991; 1997) ; Shahshani (1987); Amanollahi (1991). Specifically on Bakhtiari, see Jean-Pierre Digard (1981; 1982; 1987; 1988; 1989; 2015). These works are anthropological studies in the broad sense with no or little focus on the linguistic aspects of their subject.

Therefore, to study an Iranian ethnic group from an anthropological linguistic point of view seemed both necessary and at the same time challenging due to the lack of any previous models to follow. This is especially true in case of studies such as the third chapter of the present research, where various semantic domains are explored to open a window to the mind and the world view of the nomads. There are a few studies on other Iranian communities' kinship terms (Gheitury et al. 2010) and body parts (Abasi 2012), but a study which includes several different semantic fields of a language and studies them from an anthropological point of view was missing. Most importantly, to my knowledge, the study of bio-taxonomy of the contemporary Iranian peoples is non-existent (See 3.2 below).

In the following paragraphs, I will give a very short review of the previous linguistic studies on Bakhtiari in Persian and in other languages.

1.2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The major Persian work on the Bakhtiari language is called *Vazhe nāme-ye Zabān-e Bakhtiāri*, which is a Bakhtiari-Persian dictionary by Zohrab Maddadi (1375/1996). Maddadi is a retired literature teacher who has spent decades to collect as many Bakhtiari words as he could; he is still continuing this work (See 2.5, # 7 below). The dictionary was published in 1996 and it has been my main reference book since the beginning of my research on Bakhtiari in the late 1990s. The second edition has come out in 2013. The first edition of the book has 278 pages that contains around 4000 entries. The second edition has 327 pages, therefore contains more vocabulary, but with a minimal substantial difference from the first edition. In other words, the revision was limited to adding more entries but did not include more explanations of the previously understudied terms, especially words related to flora and fauna. As will be explained later, when it comes to botanical terminologies, in numerous cases the definition is limited to 'a kind of plant'. This shortcoming has unfortunately not been resolved in the second edition. Furthermore, the appendix of the first edition which represents some additional vocabularies was kept unchanged without an effort to include the words in the body of the book. Maddadi has also published an article entitled "On Bakhtiari Verbs" (1373/1995), which is a very general discussion of the subject but left many related issues untouched. I personally know Maddadi; he is ever so generous, and is always ready to share his data with me and with other scholars (see 2.5.7. below).

Apart from Maddadi's work, several books have been published by Bakhtiari poets and writers among others, but they only contain fragmentary pieces of information. None of them has a scientific character. Some of these works are duly mentioned in relevant discussions of the present research and in the bibliography.

In addition, there exists a small number of M.A. theses such as Ghasemi (1385/2007), and a few PhD dissertations on the Bakhtiari language from different universities of Iran, such as Taheri (1385/2007) but they usually consider only one particular linguistic characteristic of the language, for instance, "Noun Phrases in Bakhtiari". To my knowledge none of the works published by Iranian scholars to this day constitutes a comprehensive description of the language or one of its varieties.

In the same manner, when it comes to discussions on the history, geography or the ethnography of the people, all of the existing works, local or international, tend to repeat each other in many respects and this is exactly what I have tried to avoid in the present research. In all the above mentioned discussions, I have tried to apply a very critical approach, challenging the mainstream notions and providing a fresh view on each subject based on more than two decades of first-hand observatory participation in the field and on a thorough study of almost all the existing sources on the subject.

A number of non-Iranian scholars have written on the Bakhtiari language, with different intentions. Major D.L.R. Lorimer's book, *The Phonology of Bakhtiari, Badakhshani, and Madaglashti Dialects of Modern Persian (*1922) is an important and informative account of the language, which tries to give a precise phonological description and a reasonable corpus of vocabulary. However, it was written not by a linguist, but by a military man with an admirable analytical mind and a good command of different research disciplines. The main reason for giving his description, however, was geopolitical, rather than scientific. This becomes obvious in the introduction of the book, where he tries to describe the main characteristics of the Bakhtiari people for his fellow military colleagues, using a very authoritative tone and judging their behavior according to his own observation as an outsider and not according to unbiased descriptive and realistic anthropological methods and approaches. To illustrate this point more vividly two fragments of his introductory words are presented here:

> The Bakhtiārī has more of Rob Roy perhaps than of the shepherd in him, and his natural pastimes, when left to pursue his own courses, are rather raiding and robbery than poetic reflection or philosophic meditation…
>
> The Bakhtiārī, whose ruling vice in his own humble sphere is that of all Persians -greed of money and of possession - does not merely envy and grieve at the good of his neighbor; he tries to transfer it to himself (Lorimer1922: 5-6).

Lorimer's book is still very valuable, showing the state of the language almost a century ago, but the data need to be updated. Also, as with other non-native scholars, his data show occasional errors and discrepancies which may be the result of being misled by his informants. One reason for the discrepancies of his data, which are most apparent in his collection of poetry, can be explained by the arrangement of his informants. From his notes we understand that he has collected his data from his troops in southern Persia, and that he took down the poetry in Kerman, where he acted as the vice-consul of Great Britain. One can imagine that the soldiers were asked to recite some Bakhtiari verses, and that they, under the authoritative pressure of their commander would sing whatever would come to their mind. This may explain why we find a verse from a wedding song next to a line from a lamentation in the collection. In 2014, I consulted Lorimer's manuscripts in SOAS. The ample size of the collection and his precision in the tedious preparation of the transcription and the translation of his data, left me with a sense of wonder and admiration. Despite the valuable efforts of Fereydun Vahman and Garnik Asatrian in publishing two volumes of Lorimer's data (1987 and 1995), I believe that his manuscripts contain much more precious socio-historical information to be discovered by future scholarly research.

G.L. Windfuhr in his article "The Bakhtiari Dialect" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1988), has tried to cover all major linguistic aspects of the language and compare them with other West Iranian languages including Modern Persian. This article is very informative, as is to be expected from a major scholar, and it provides many useful insights on the subject. It seems, however, that his main informants had Luri origins, because he always tries to compare Bakhtiari with other Luri or Kurdish dialects of the region. In other words, he uses Luri as the criterion to measure Bakhtiari deviation from the norms of West Iranian languages. This, I think, may lead the researcher to ignore or misinterpret some unique characteristics of Bakhtiari simply as deviations.

Pierre Lecoq (1989), in *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum* gives a very general overview of all West Iranian languages. This article, "Les dialects du sud-ouest de l'Iran", is also very valuable and informative. It has a comparative approach and summarizes the major linguistic similarities of the southwestern language varieties, although some of the Bakhtiari examples are not precise or correct, such as *nift* instead of *noft* 'nose' (Lecoq 1989: 345).

A comparative work, "Update on Luri: How Many Languages?" (2003), has been done by Erik John Anonby in Leiden. In this work Anonby has established the existence of three separate languages in the Luri continuum: Luristāni, Bakhtiāri and Southern Luri in the western, southwestern and southern regions of Iran. In his survey, which distinguishes a variety of languages spoken in the region, he comes across Bakhtiari surrounded by two Luri variants, but he concludes that although there are many similarities between the languages, a line should be drawn to separate Bakhtiari from Luri and Persian. I have presented my view on this subject in the introductory section of the present research (See 2.3 below). Anonby's work is focused on the phonological aspects of these languages and has some brief accounts of the morphology and other linguistic aspects of Luri languages. His work also includes several useful wordlists of Bakhtiari and some varieties of Luri for comparative purposes. Some of the Bakhtiari data, unfortunately, are not precisely recorded.[8] In 2014, Anonby's latest book on Bakhtiari, entitled: *Bakhtiari Studies, Phonology, Text, Lexicon* was published. This work focuses on the phonology of Bakhtiari which constitutes the major part of the book. I found sections 2.5 *Prosodic phenomena* and 2.6 *Morphophonemic processes* particularly interesting and informative. Unfortunately the book was published after I had written my part on phonology, otherwise I could have incorporated its analysis into my own data. In several parts of the present work, however, Anonby's point of view is added, either as a footnote or in the related discussions. Anonby (2014) has also included a glossed and translated text which is very helpful to get an overview of the syntax of the language. The accompanying grammatical guide and vocabulary are also very practical, both to read and to understand the text and also to become more famil-

8. Some of these words are items 13, 19, 87, 126, 129, 135, 144 and 147, as some examples of the above mentioned inaccuracy.

iar with the language. There are, however, some phonological and morphological points about which we have different opinions, some of them are mentioned in the body of the present work in the relative sections.

Mohsen Farsani's PhD dissertation *Étude Lexicologique de la Langue Bakhtiari D'Iran* was apparently designed to cover all the grammatical aspects of the language plus a thorough study of its lexicon. The four chapters of the research contain, accordingly, discussions on the phonology, morphology, the syntax, as well as different sematic fields of the language. When I heard about this research back in 2011, I made many efforts to contact him and to get hold of a copy of his work, but all my attempts failed. I meant to incorporate his data or methodology into my study to reach to a more comprehensive study of the language. I finally received a copy of this work by the generous help of Johnny Cheung, but only in April 2017 when I was completing the last editing of my book. Since I did not have the chance to refer to his work during the process of writing my research, unlike the previous works mentioned in this section, I try to give it a fair share of attention in the following paragraphs.

I found Farsani's work valuable in the sense that he has covered many semantic domains in a comparative approach, unlike my research, and for many words and terms he has succeeded to provide Old and Middle Iranian cognates as well as cognates from other modern Iranian languages. The French translation of the Bakhtiari words is also an added value for this field of research. He has also covered domains that are missing in the present research, such as his section 8: Traditional Bakhtiari Music (pp. 334-338); section 9: Ceremonies (pp. 339-372); section 10: Astronomy (pp. 372-379); section 11: Personal objects of Men and Women (p. 379); section 12: Words related to professions (p. 381-389) and the last section of his lexicon part, section 13: The trivial language and insults (p. 389-395). In the final chapter of his dissertation (chapter IV) Farsani has included two folk tales, transcribed but not glossed, followed by their French translations. These tales are not specifically Bakhtiari, but they are popular among several peoples residing along the Zagros mountains.

The downside of Farsani's work is, however, the anecdotal and at times highly chaotic nature of his presentation. The introductory part of the work is a repetition of previous sources or simply renders his informants' words verbatim. There exist multiple grammatical inaccuracies. Farsani is not a native speaker of Bakhtiari,[9] and this may explain part of the discrepancies of the data. As for his lexicographic chapter, the lack of an obvious theoretical framework in presenting the lexicon makes it chaotic and at times it is very confusing because the same term is represented in different lists with no explanation for the change in their meanings.[10]

9. In page 3 of the thesis he explains his orientation with Bakhtiari thus: "I have been able to conduct this study because for years our family have lived alongside the bakhtiari people and I have experienced conversations and meetings with storytellers and poets who keep the language alive and allow us to preserve and study their language."

10. Some examples are presented here. I should mention that in the version that I have received the pages are numbered only up to the page 157, therefore, here I can only refer to the sections instead

In general, although Farsani has made a tremendous effort to cover as many semantic fields as possible, his discussions of the fields remain superficial with diverse discrepancies in their presentation. I hope that many of the above mentioned problems will be resolved in his published version, if there exists one.

Going through all the previous efforts on describing different aspects of Bakhtiari, it still remains a fact that this language has unfortunately not yet received consistent scholarly attention. Therefore, the lack of a good account of this lesser known language is sorely missing.

1.3 METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

In order to be able to provide a coherent description and avoid discrepancies and vagueness, I will focus on the speech of the Hamule tribe of the Bakhtiari, to which I belong. The Bakhtiaris are split into two main confederations: Haft Lang and Chahar Lang, Hamule being a subdivision of the Haft Lang confederation. A detailed description of this special social structure is given in the section 2.2 below.

By pursuing this method, I will provide a detailed description of the Hamule variant, which, with minor changes that are to be indicated, will also be valid for other branches of the Haft Lang confederation. My description will further include many aspects of the Bakhtiari language in general, i.e. both Haft Lang and Chahar Lang variants, but will leave the minor differences, especially those of a phonological nature, for a later consideration.

I have gathered my data mostly by means of fieldwork, partly also by library research. Most of the linguistic fieldwork has been carried out during two decades of working and living with nomads as explained in more detail in the preface. Throughout this prolonged interaction, I have also gathered a great deal of audio-visual data.

I am privileged by having some well-qualified consultants at my disposal. In other words, I was able to contact my relatives back home through telephone and

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of the exact page numbers.: alaf ‘herbe’ is presented in section 2. L’Agriculture and again in 2.1.2. Moisson et la Récolte as ‘pâture, herbe’ followed by a saying including the word alaf (mes alaf xers xarj kerden (in Farsani’s transcription)), translated in French as ‘dépenserfollement, jeter l’argent par la fenêtre’. Sometimes the terms are misplaced, such as the term awza (æwzæ in my transcription see 3.2.1.1 below) which refers to a kind of sheep, in the middle compounds relating to irrigation and accordingly having the word aw ‘water’ as their first constituent. There are words that are not recorded correctly, such as melk instead of merk ‘elbow’ in section on body parts (1.2). Whether this is a typo or an error in recording the term, mistakes such as this are very grave in documenting a language because these words can be used as minimal pairs, in which melk means ‘property, a piece of land’. In the same section which constitutes 132 body parts, several words and compounds are not genuinely Bakhtiari, but Persian; examples are: ostexunŋ-fak bâlâ ‘Os maxilliaire’, ostexunŋ tarqova ‘Clavicule’, gune ‘joue’ or sâq-e pâ ‘jambe’. As can be seen from these last examples, throughout his work, Farsani is not consistent in presenting the Ezafe marker or other grammatical morphemes while discussing the lexicon.

internet to ask my questions or to clarify some data. I insist here on using the term "consultant" and not "informant", because my situation as a semi-native and local researcher makes this investigation more "participatory" than "observatory". Therefore, instead of interviewing or questioning the nomads, which tends to create unrealistic situations, I have always gathered my data in the midst of a natural, everyday conversation or discussion. Of course, there were times when I wanted to clarify a specific grammatical or semantic point in which case I would consult my more educated Bakhtiari relatives or consultants.

A very crucial and eye-opening experience for me was the participation in a seasonal migration on Autumn of 2007. It was at that time and during that week of constant walking and living with nomads that I came to the realization that the way they see and categorize the natural world around them is different from that of an urban person. This triggered my interest and laid basis for a a long and fascinating research the result of which can be seen in the section 3.2 of the present work.

At the end of this section I want to emphasize the importance of the new mobile applications for doing what I call virtual field work. While working in my office in Leiden, there were moments that I urgently needed to check, for example, the exact meaning or pragmatic aspect of a term. A very convenient way to do this in the quickest possible way is to text or audio message the question to a relative or young nomad, who are nowadays generally equipped with at least one android mobile phone in each household, and he or she will send back an audio file from an elder in the tribe in which you will receive all the necessary information as if you are sitting next to that elder under the black tent in the field and have a natural conversation. While writing the sections on fauna and flora, I used these applications, especially WhatsApp and Telegram, almost on a daily basis to check the minute details regarding my data by receiving audios and photos depicting a certain plant or the color or the shape of the horn of a certain domestic animal. I have used Facebook, as well, for checking some data with my urban consultants such as Maddadi. I could not use Facebook, Skype and video messaging to work with the nomads in the field, because the former is blocked in Iran and people can use it only by installing special proxies not available to everyone, and the latter is hard to use because high speed internet is not available everywhere, especially in the blind spots in the middle of the mountains. One other obstacle to use internet dependent applications is that generally people should buy internet bundles which are not always cheap and it can happen that in the middle of a conversation they run out of access to the internet and you should wait until they recharge their bundle. However, the perspective of using new public technologies for doing field work seems very exciting and promising.

1.4 THE ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK

This research is organized in two sections, six chapters and ten appendices.

Chapter one contains some introductory remarks on the reasons behind the choice of Bakhtiari for this research and the background studies, as well as some explanations over the methods that were employed to carry out this study. Some ideas for further research are also suggested in the last section of this chapter (See 1.5 below).

In chapter two the socio-historical background of the Bakhtiaris is critically reviewed by providing first hand observational and analytic facts that at times contradict the existing and mainstream notions on the subject. As an example, in section 2.2.2, a new etymology for *læng* is proposed. This word is a crucial term in Bakhtiari but its meaning is ambiguous. In the last two hundred years, a number of hypotheses on its meaning have been repeated without substantial revision. Here all the previous notions are reviewed critically and the proposed etymology incorporates the ideas and suggestions of some prominent contemporary linguists specialized in Iranian studies. At the end of chapter two, parts of my M.A thesis are included. Although it was carried out around two decades ago, it is considered to this day as a pioneer socio-linguistic study on a modern Iranian language, subsequently, several articles, M.A. theses and PhD theses have been written at the Iranian universities based on this model. [11]

Chapter three presents a novel study for an Iranian language, viz. a semantic study of the vocabulary from an anthropological viewpoint. For this research I had no previous model to follow, so it presented many challenges. The chapter contains two sections. In the first section the semantic fields of kinship terms (3.1.1) and body parts (3.1.3) are detailed studies based on existing theories of language universals and word categories.[12] The second part of the chapter three is a new study of the Bakhtiari fauna and flora. It investigates the ways in which Bakhtiari nomads classify their natural surroundings (Ethno-taxonomy). The study of ethnic taxonomies, or as it is usually referred to, Ethno-biology, is relatively new, and to this day it has not received due attention among scholars working on the Iranian languages. Therefore, at the beginning of this chapter, this field of study is introduced very briefly and then several semantic fields of Bakhtiari are examined. The new findings are presented with tentative explanations that are rooted in the cultural history of the nomads.

Chapters four to six constitute the linguistic part of the study. In chapter four a brief introduction to the phonemic system of the present day Haftlang variety of Bakhtiari is provided. This chapter should be regarded as a guide to study the bulk

11. Khademi (2003), Kazemi (2010), Taheri-Ardali (2015) to name just a few of the most recent of these researches.

12. A study on color terms was designed to be included in this section, but due to the need for more fieldwork, the related data is presented as a table with some introductory explanation (Appendix 3).

of the words and sentences that are used throughout the book. For a more detailed study of the Bakhtiari phonology, the interested reader is encouraged to consult Anonby (2014).

In chapter five a thorough discussion of noun morphology is presented. All the different categories of nominal morphology are addressed, with detailed examples gathered through decades of research. Derivational morphology is not covered in the present volume; the relevant, extensive data must await a future opportunity to produce a more comprehensive description of the language.

Chapter six is a thorough description of Bakhtiari verbs. An attempt is made to categorize different verb classes using mainly synchronic data. In the description of the verbs, it was inevitable to resort to a historical explanation to deal with some minor grammatical issues.

It should be noted that chapters five and six are modelled on the traditional grammars of Persian and other Iranian languages. I chose not to depart from the centuries-old tradition of Persian grammar writing in the case of the Bakhtiari grammar, also in order to maintain comparability with other grammars of Iranian languages and dialects. Therefore, at times, it may seem that the description is not strictly from within the language, as in the case of introducing some forms of subjunctive verbs separately under a heading as Imperatives. However, the synchronic state of matters can at all times be seen by the reader.

The ten appendices contain word lists, the content of which are either partly (1, 9) or fully (3, 6, 7 and 10) discussed in the body of the research and they are represented as an appendix to be used as a quick vocabulary reference. Some other word lists 2, 4 and 5) have not been discussed in the book. These word lists, however, contain important data to be used in later anthropological or philological studies.

1.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

There are several other important areas that I wish to cover in later stages of my work. Generally speaking, each chapter of this research can be the subject of another PhD dissertation.

Derivational morphology and syntax of Bakhtiari are the two main subjects for future linguistic concern.

As for the lexicon section, the present data, especially the lists in the appendices, can be considered just as a raw material for diverse anthropological, semantic and philological studies in the future.

Comparative and typological works on other west Iranian languages and further on with other families of the Iranian languages is a necessity which hopefully will attract the attention of all the scholars in the field.

The anthropological model presented in this work can be used to study other Iranian nomads and ethnic groups. This model can also be modified and developed to study the terminology and the word categories used by professional communities, such as the fishermen on The Persian Gulf or the Caspian sea, the date cultivators on the southern half of the country, or to study communities that are involved in the horse domestication and training in the northern and north eastern regions, such as the Turkmens. Although Iran is a very diverse country, geographically as well as ethnically, these studies do not have to be confined within the geographical borders of the Iranian communities, the results of which can be incorporated in the anthropological studies of a more international nature.

I hope, however, that this research, in its present shape and content, will contribute some significant and valuable data to the field of linguistics and philology in general and Iranian linguistics and anthropology in particular.