



# ISFAHAN XIX. JEWISH DIALECT

---

## ISFAHAN

### xix. JEWISH DIALECT

*Introduction.* The dialect spoken by the Jews of Isfahan (henceforth Isfj.) belongs to the Central Dialect (CPD) group (also called Median dialects by some scholars) of Northwestern Iranian languages (NWI). The original speech form of the city of Isfahan (see also [xxi. PROVINCIAL DIALECTS](#) and [xx. GEOGRAPHY OF THE MEDIAN DIALECTS OF ISFAHAN](#)) was probably very similar to Isfj. and remained in the Jewish community but died out in the Muslim community, not without leaving its influence, however, on the type of Persian spoken in Isfahan. According to Ehsan Yarshater's informants in 1970, there were about 2,500 Jewish residents in Isfahan at the time, a decrease from possibly 13,000 in the heyday of the community, and there were over twenty synagogues, some of which by 1970 were in disuse. The Jewish population is centered in the section of Isfahan known as Jubāra as well as throughout the city. Donald Stilo's notes were also provided by a local rabbi in a synagogue in Jubāra in 1964. While the Jewish community of Isfahan has been greatly reduced, Isfj. is still spoken among various generations there. In the diaspora, the dialect is still spoken by the older generation in Israel, Los Angeles, and New York City and sporadically in other large urban centers.



*History and classification.* The Jewish dialects of Isfahan, Kāshān, Hamadān, Borujerd, Yazd, Kermān and others belong to the Central dialect group of Northwestern Iranian. All of Northwestern Iranian languages, in turn, are descended from Median, whereas Persian (including Middle Persian or Pahlavi) belongs to the Southwestern Iranian (SWI) group and are descended from Old Persian. Since Persian and modern “Median” dialects are two completely different linguistic groups within Iranian that diverged over 2,500 years ago, the term “Judeo-Persian,” which is sometimes applied to Isfj. (as well as other dialects spoken by the Jewish communities listed above), is to be considered a misnomer. “Judeo-Persian” is more accurately applied specifically to Persian dialects as spoken (or written) within Jewish communities in different locales and especially at different time periods, beginning with the earliest forms of New Persian in the 8th century C.E. Since Isfj. and other Central dialects have borrowed extensively from Persian, especially within the lexical domain, they may seem to be very similar to Persian, but a closer look at the diachronics, the native lexicon and grammar as laid out below will suffice to show the radical differences between Persian as opposed to Isfj. and other Northwestern languages and dialects.

*Diachronics.* Important differences in the development of proto-Iranian consonants in Median/NWI and Old Persian/SWI show that they were already distinct from each other before the time of the cuneiform inscriptions of the Achaemenian period. The two groups diverged even more in the Middle Iranian and early Modern Iranian periods. Thus, to take one characteristic example, proto-Iranian \*dz (corresponding to Skt. *j-*) yields different reflexes in Old Persian (and its descendants in modern SWI) from those of Median (and its descendants in modern NWI). Words that had a proto-Iranian \*dz-, such as “to know” and “son-in-law,” yielded words that begin with *d-* in Southwestern languages (cf. Persian *dān-* and *dāmād*) as opposed to words with *z-* in the Northwestern family (Av. *zan-* “know” and *zāmātar* “son-in-law,” cf. Skt. *jān-* and *jāmātar-*, respectively). In examining a sampling of the Central dialects, as well as other Northwestern Iranian languages outside the Central dialects, we find the following forms, all beginning with *z-* and meaning “know (present/past stems)” and “son-in-law,” respectively: Isfj.: *zun-/zunā* and *zumāz*; Hamadāni Jewish: *zun-/zunā* and *dumād* (the latter a borrowing from Persian); Gazi: *zun-/zunāšt* and *zomā*; Anāraki: *zon-/zono* and *zomā*; K̄vānsāri: *zun-/zunā* and *zumā*; Yazdi Zoroastrian: *zon-/zonod* and *zomād*; Āštiāni: *zān-/zānā* and *zāmā*; and beyond the Central dialects, Semnāni: *zun-/zuni* and *zomā* ~ *zumi*; Tāleši (Māsula’i): *zon-/zonoss* and *zemā*; Gilaki: *dān-/dānəst* (borrowed



from Persian) and *zāmā*; Baluchi: *zān-/zānt* and *zamās*; Kurdish (Kurmanji): *zān-/zāni* and *zāvā*. There are many more examples of the differences in sounds that distinguish Persian and other SWI from all NWI languages and dialects, including Isfj., Gazi, and other Central dialects, some of which are given below.

NWI developments from proto-Iranian in Isfj. include: *\*dz > z*, as in Isfj. *zun/zunā* “know,” *zumāz* “son-in-law” (as discussed above), *ezerí* “yesterday”; *\*tsv- > sp-*: Isfj. *išpiš* “louse,” *esbez* “white”; *\*dzv- > zb* in Isfj. *ozun* “tongue,” where *-b-* was probably absorbed into the *u* much later (e.g., *zbān > zvān > ozvun > ozun*, or some similar process); *\*dv- > b-*, as in *bar* “door,” *abi* “other”; *\*y-* remains as *y-* (vs. SWI *j-*) as in Isfj. *ye* “barley,” *yuš-* “boil”; *\*v-* remains as *v-* (instead of SWI *g-*) in Isfj. *veyše* “hungry,” *v(e)zer-/v(e)zašd* “pass,” and as *v-* (vs. SWI *b-*) in Isfj. *vāzum* “almond,” *vārun* “rain,” *vij-/vit* “sift,” *viye* “widow,” *viθ* “twenty,” *vāz* “wind”; initial *\*j-* remains as *j-* (vs. SWI *z-*) in *jan* “wife, play (instrument),” *jande* “alive”; medial *\*č- > -j-* (vs. SWI *z-*) as in *tej-* “run,” *vij-* “sift,” *vājār* “bazaar, market,” *jir* “under, down” (< *\*haca adara-*); *\*xw > x* as in *xunt* “read,” *xox* “sister,” *xow* “sleep (N),” but note also: *\*xw > ø* in *owθ-/ofd-* “sleep.” The typical NWI change *\*-xt > -(h)t ~ -(t)t*, is represented in Isfj. *sowt* “burned,” *dot* “daughter, girl,” *rit* “poured,” *vit* “sifted,” *vāt* “said.” The usually parallel development of *\*-ft > NWI -(h)t ~ -(t)t*, however, either did not occur in Isfj. or its absence is possibly due to an effect of Persian or other SWI influence: *dar-kaft* “fall,” *i-ofd* “sleep,” *i-geft ~ gift* “take” (but cf. Gazi *i-git*).

*\*fr > r* as in *kāre~gāre* “down” (< Av. *gufra-*, *ǰafra-*) and possibly *\*fr- > i-* in the Isfj. preverb *i~e-* (see “Preverbs” below). Eşfahāni Jewish and the dialects of the immediate Isfahan area (specifically Gazi, Kōrzuqī, Sedehi, and Sagzāvi) have an *i- ~ e-* preverb in the same verbs in which other NWI have the corresponding preverb *hā- < \*fra-*. Compare Isfj. *i-gi(r)* “take, get,” *i-ni* “sit,” *i-owθ* “sleep,” *e-tā* “give,” *e-n-* “put,” *e-band* “hit,” *e-parθ* “ask” with the same verbs in: Kafrāni (*hā-gir*, *hā-ning*, *ā-xus*, *hā-t*, *hā-nā*, —, —), Anāraki (*ha-gir*, *hanik*, *ha-wsi*, *ha-t*, *ha-nā*, *hab-end*, —), Alviri (a Tāti language) (*hā-gir*, *hā-neš*, *hā-xös*, *ā-d*, *hā-nā*, —, —), Vafsi (a Tāti language) (*hā-gir*, *hā-nešin*, —, *hā-d*, *hā-ni*, —, *hā-pars*) and Māzanderāni (*hā-gir*, *he-niš*, —, *hā-de*, —, —, *hā-pers*). Other cases of original *\*fr-* are seen in Isfj. only as *fr-*, which is typical of SWI (*ferāš/ferāt* “sell,” *feresn/-ā* “send”); *\*θr > r*: *pir* “son” and *ār-ci* “hand mill” (cf. the root minus the diminutive suffix *-ci* with: K̄vānsāri, Jowšaqāni *ār*, Meyma’i or “mill” < Av. *ārθra-*, but Isfj. *āsiow* “mill” < SWI); *\*xr- > Isfj. ir-*: *\*xrin-* “buy” > *irin-/irint*, but other examples of this development in initial position were not



found. Medial \*-xr- > IsfJ. -r-: *θir* “red.” See also a longer discussion of the reflexes of \*fr-, \*θr-, \*xr- under *Diachronics* in xxii, below.

IsfJ. is conservative in preserving medial and final \*d, both medially and finally as δ~z and medially occasionally also as -d- (equivalents are also given in other Central dialects, where these consonants are either weakened to -y, -v or are lost): IsfJ. *vāzum* ~ *vāδum*~*vādum* “almond,” *cezor*~*ceδor* “chador,” *xód-e*~*xoz-e* ~ *xoδ-e* “with” (Farizandi *vāyom*, *cāyūr*, *xāy*), *bezār* ~ *beδār* “brother” (Kvānsāri *berā*), *keze* ~ *keδe* “house” (Meyma’i *kiye*), *ruze* ~ *ruδe* “intestine” (Sedehi *ruve*), *v(e)zer/v(e)zašd-* ~ *v(e)δer/v(e)δašd-* “pass” (Yārāndi *viar/viašt-*), *diz* ~ *diδ* “smoke,” *zumāz*~*δumāδ* “son-in-law” (Zefra’i *dū*, *zomā*), *esbez* ~ *eθbeδ* “white” (Sedehi *esbe*), *māz* ~ *māδ* “mother,” *vāz* ~ *vāδ* “wind” (Naṭānzi *māy*, *vāy*).

Original \*ū, even in Arabic borrowings, is generally fronted to *i* as in *xin* “blood,” *pir* “boy, son,” *miš* “mouse,” *diz* “smoke,” *θir* “red,” *āris* “bride,” *haθit* “jealous,” *til* “length.” This change, however, is not universal in IsfJ.: *θuδue* “it burns,” *dušnue* “he milks,” *gušd* “meat.” Original \*ā changes to *u* before nasals: *ume* “come,” *zumāz* “son-in-law,” (ve-) *mun/mund* “stay,” *un* “that,” *vun* “there.”

*Phonology.* IsfJ. consonants are *p, b, t, d, c, j, k, g, q~γ, f, v, s, z, š, x, h, m, n, r, l, y*, but note that: a) *z, s* alternate freely with interdental *δ, θ* respectively: *δunun*~*zunun* “I know,” *bépez* ~ *bépeδ!* “cook!,” *eδeri*~*ezeri* “yesterday,” *tarsue*~*tarθue* “he fears,” *véroθ* ~ *véros* “get up!”; b) medial -d- sometimes alternates with -δ (and occasionally -z-): *pírodun*~*píroδun* “your son,” *xód-e*~*xóδ-e* ~ *xoz-e* “with,” *vāzum*~*vāδum*~*vādum* “almond”; c) *č* and *j* (= *ǰ*, which in IsfJ. includes *ž* of other languages) are palatalized to *ć* and *ǰ*: *ćirići* “sparrow, chick,” *biǰan* “man’s name.” Noteworthy in the vowel system (*i, e, a, u, o, ā, ey, ew*) is the *ew* diphthong, resulting both from an original glide as well as from the change of *b, f* > *w*: *mew* “vine,” *kewk* “partridge,” *lew* “lip,” *kewš* “shoe,” *kelews* “celery,” cf. Persian *mow, kabk, lab, kafš, karafs*, respectively.

*Stress* in Eşfahāni Jewish is mostly word-final, but some morphemes, particularly in verbal categories, cause the stress to shift away from final position: the prefix *bé-* (*bé-m-bart* “I carried”) and the preverbs of the subjunctive, imperative, preterit, and perfect tenses; the person endings in the present (*ār-ún-e* “I bring,” *ber-úv-e* “he carries”); the participial element in the imperfect (*umó-un-e* “I would come,” *baθté-š-e* “he would hit,” *ve-garté-nd-e* “they would return”). Stress usually contrasts between the present and subjunctive forms with preverbs: *ve-krúne* “I open” vs. *vé-krun* “that I open.”



The stress-pitch system of Isfj. is quite a rare case in that it seems to be the exact opposite of the situation found in most languages of the world: in Isfj. unstressed syllables have high pitch and the stressed syllables have low pitch. This unusual situation in effect makes the pronunciation of a word sound to the uninitiated ear as if the stress is placed on the unstressed syllable due to the higher pitch. This author thus first heard the words *pírom* “my son” and *beḏā’rom* “my brother” as *piróm* and *bédārom* with the stress incorrectly assigned due to the unusual pitch system; compare Rubène Abrahamian’s *círí* “sparrow,” *ā’lā* “now,” *éšnide* “you hear,” instead the expected *cirí*, *ālā’*, *ešníde*, possibly incorrectly notated for the same reasons. This unusual pattern is also shared by Isfahani Persian, probably as a leftover from the original dialect of the city. Compare the following parallel patterns of two simple sentences in Tehrani Persian and Isfahani Persian:

Tehrani (3 levels): [Example 1](#)

Isfahani (2 levels?): [Example 2](#)

“Where are you going? Is your house nearby?”

A more careful and detailed analysis of the unusual stress-pitch system patterns of the Persian and NWI dialects in the area from Isfahan to Yazd needs to be conducted.

*Noun phrase.* Number: Isfj. nouns and pronouns do not indicate gender or formal case (but see the discussion of *-(r)ā*, below). There is one type of plural ending in *-ā*: *doḏḏ-ā* “thieves,” *gorg-ā* “wolves,” *guš-ā* “ears,” *kenisā-ā* “synagogues.” The two indefinite markers occur either separately or together: *ye* “one” and/or an unstressed *-i*: *xurúθi*, *ye xuruθ*, *ye xurúθi* “a rooster.”

*Object marking.* Definite direct objects are marked with unstressed *-(r)ā*, but less commonly in the tenses of the past system (see *Fronting* below for a discussion of this phenomenon): *bid hāmā-rā bévenid* “come see us,” *dandunā-š-ā be-am bé-š-xerāšā* “he pressed (i.e., gritted) his teeth together.” The combination of the preposition *še* + the short pronominal suffixes (Set<sub>2</sub>, see [Table 1](#)) also marks (1) direct objects either (a) alone: *še-m bandíe?* “Will you hit me?” or (b) *še* + Set<sub>2</sub> along with the full pronoun marked by *-(r)ā*: *mun tó-rā še-d nébandune* “I won’t hit you,” and (2) indirect objects (*pilā-m-ā še-d nétune* “I won’t give you my money”). As will be shown below (see *Person endings*, *Fronting*) the Set<sub>2</sub> endings that indicate the past subject are rather mobile and



very commonly move off the verb and shift forward in the sentence, hence the designation “Fronting.” Thus when a Set<sub>2</sub> subject ending is moved from the verb to *še* that already has a Set<sub>2</sub> possessive ending, two Set<sub>2</sub> endings will then occur together: *še<sub>1</sub>-š<sub>2</sub>-om<sub>3</sub> baθ<sub>4</sub>* “I<sub>3</sub> hit<sub>4</sub> him<sub>1-2</sub>,” *še<sub>1</sub>-š<sub>2</sub>-oš<sub>3</sub> dā<sub>4</sub>* “he<sub>3</sub> gave<sub>4</sub> (it) to<sub>1</sub> him<sub>2</sub>.” With indirect objects, the Set<sub>2</sub> ending sometimes also moves to an earlier word in the sentence, in which case *še* then stands alone: *še-d* “to you” > *xeδā omr-od še é-tā* “may God give you (long) life.” See also *Prepositions* below for more information on indicating indirect objects.

Set<sub>2</sub> ending inserted between the suffixes for person (Set<sub>1</sub>) and tense (-e) in the present also optionally indicates pronoun direct objects: *band-ún-ešun-e* “I’ll hit them,” *keš-end-ed-e* “they’ll kill you,” but in the subjunctive, optative, and imperative, Set<sub>2</sub> as object comes either just before the verb stem (*bé-d-beru* “[that] he takes you,” *xeδā bé-š-kešā* “may God kill him,” *bé-š-ārid* “bring [pl.] him,” *bi-šun-gi* “grab them!”) or occasionally at the end: *bétarsen-eš* “frighten him!”). In addition, according to Irān Kalbāsi (1994), two short form pronouns (Set<sub>2</sub>) can appear together to indicate both subject and object in past tenses: *be-šun<sub>1</sub>-oš<sub>2</sub>-ferāt* “they<sub>1</sub> sold it<sub>2</sub>,” *pušd-om-oš-e* “I used to wear it,” but this construction is not found in any other published sources or field notes for Isfj., and it may represent a very recent innovation in Isfj. (most likely under the influence of colloquial Persian among the younger generation, and possibly only from elicited, i.e., translated, examples; it would be informative to track the frequency of this construction in spontaneous speech among speakers of different ages). If only one Set<sub>2</sub> ending occurs in a past tense, it obligatorily indicates the subject, never the object. Thus while *peydā-mun kard* in colloquial Persian means “he found us,” the equivalent in Isfj., *peydā-mun kart*, can only mean “we found (him/it).” In sum, to show pronouns as direct objects in the past tense, either the full form of the pronoun or a second Set<sub>2</sub> ending is possible: *āmā-rā peydā-š kart* ~ *peydā-š-omun kart* (the latter in Kalbāsi only) “he found us,” but the former seems to be preferred, at least in older sources.

As in Gazi (q.v.), Isfj. also quite commonly indicates full direct objects doubly by both the full noun or pronoun plus the Set<sub>2</sub> endings: *doδde-rā še-š ne-band* “don’t hit the thief!,” *un-ā be-š-ven* “see him!,” *mun tó-rā še-d nébandune* “I won’t hit you.”

Modifiers follow the noun generally connected by an *ežāfa*, for instance, possessives: *dím-e vece* “the child’s face,” *váxd-e deróv-e šemā* “the time of your harvest,” *bár-e keniθā* “the door of the synagogue,” but the *ežāfa* often drops



(see also Gazi), especially after a vowel: *keḏé xóx-om* “my sister’s house,” *buvā vece* “the child’s father,” *beletarā mahalle* “the great (people) of the neighborhood.” Possessive pronouns are either full forms or Set<sub>2</sub> suffixes: *pír-om* ~ *mun~pír-om* “my son,” but the latter are by far more common: *bedār-om madreḡe nešue* “my brother doesn’t go to school,” *pír-od key be xune yue?* “when will your son come home?” *anšew kami hāl-oš veytar-u* “he feels a little better tonight.” Adjective Modifiers with the *ezāfa*: *nasihát-e xab* “good advice,” *moallém-e pārisi* “Parisian teacher,” *xox-e kuculi dārūn* “I have a younger sister,” but the *ezāfa* may occasionally drop (*vece-širi* “nursing infant”). The plural suffix may shift from the noun to the adjective: *vece-iθrāel-ā* “the Jewish children.”

Demonstratives in IsfJ. are *in* “this,” *un* “that,” *amin/amun* “this/that very (same)”: *in mard* “this man,” *un kār* “that work,” *gumā-bu amin amšew béšim* “we must go this very night.”

*Pronouns.* Table 1 gives three types of pronouns: full pronouns for subject (and various other uses), full direct object forms, and Set<sub>2</sub> suffixes with various functions (described passim throughout this entry), as well as the Set<sub>1</sub> person endings on the verb.

Reflexives are *xo-*, *xoc-* + Set<sub>2</sub> endings but the difference between them, if any, is not clear. Both are used in IsfJ. after prepositions (*píš-e xó-š* “to himself,” *déwr-e xóc-aš* “around himself”), as possessives (*vece xo-d-u?* “Is he your own child?” *bešā-š fekrhā-ye xóc-aš-ā amali karu* “he can realize his (own) thoughts,”) and as emphatics (*xó-mun šíme tu xarman* “we’ll go to the harvest ourselves,” *mo xóc-am ún-ā tu maḡra’e bi-m-di* “I myself saw him in the field,” *xóc-aš yúve* “she’ll come by herself”). Only two examples of reflexives as direct objects were found in the available corpora: *mun xóc-am-ā be in kār ādat-om e-dā* “I have accustomed myself to this (work)” (Kalbāsi), *amšew gumā-bu xoc-am-rā be ša:r bereḡnun* “I must get (lit: deliver) myself to the city tonight” (Borjiān). *Prepositions.* Other than *aḡ* “from,” *še*, *be* “to,” *dā~tā* “until,” *tu*, *der* “in” etc., prepositions usually require an *ezāfa*: *xód-e* “with,” *píš-e* “at, to (person),” *dím-e* “on,” etc. Exx: *aḡ jir* “from below,” *dā šew* “until night,” *xód-e cu* “with a stick,” *xód-e jan-om* “with my wife,” *dím-e áḡb-oš* “on his horse.” *še*, *be* and *píš-e* indicate indirect objects: *be āmā buváid* “tell us,” *mun píš-e pír-od bé-m-vāt* “I told your son,” *pil-oš-ā še-š de!* “Give him his money!” Prepositions may also take Set<sub>2</sub> endings: *xód-om*, *xód-ot*, *xód-oš* “with me, you, him,” *gu-m-e xód-ot béngārūn* “I want to speak with you.” With “to be” of location, especially be3 (see below), the prepositions indicating “in” are often left unexpressed:



*sebāh šew mon keše der-un* “I’ll be home tomorrow night.”

*Verb phrase.* Verb stems. Isfj. generally has the usual types of past formations seen in other Iranian languages, e.g., *gir-/gird~gi* “take, catch,” *band-/baθθ* “hit,” *k-/kafd* “fall,” *rij-/rit* “pour,” *al~ arz-/ašt* “let,” *ven-/di* “see,” but most past stems follow two regular patterns: 1) a smaller group in *-t* after an *-r* or *-n* of the root: *jār/-t* “chew,” *emar/-t* “break,” *xešār/-t* “press,” *birin/-t* “cut,” *xun/-t* “read,” *jan/-t* “hit” (final *-t* is possibly a conservative feature; very few stems take the past formant *-d*, e.g., *mund-an* “stay”); 2) a much larger group in *-ā*: *zun/-ā* “know,” *var-veδ/-ā* “jump,” *tanj/-ā* “drink,” *kelāš/-ā* “itch.” Sometimes a slight change in the root vowel also occurs: *ber-/bart* “take away,” *xuθ-/xoθ(θ)* “throw.” Roots originally beginning with a vowel often accrue an initial *-r* from a preverb, e.g., *\*ver-oθ ~ ver-ows > ve-rows* “get up,” as seen from the negative forms: *venéroθune* “I don’t get up” (= *\*ver-oθ-un-e > ve-roθ- > ve-né-roθ-*). See also the same process with this root in Caspian languages: Gilaki (Langarudi) *vi-ris* (< *vir-is*) vs. *neg: vi-n-ris*, but the original *-r* is not shifted to the root in Māzanderāni *her-est! / néstā!*, “get up! / don’t get up!”

Preverbs create finer nuances, lexical extensions, or total meaning changes of a verb root: *bí-gi* “grab! catch!” vs. *vé-gi* “pick up!” vs. *í-gi* “get! buy!”; *gartúne* “I walk around” vs. *vé-gartune* “I return”; *mālúne* “I rub” vs. *var-mālune* “I flee,” *cinúve* “he picks (fruit, etc.)” vs. *var-cinúve* “(bird) pecks at (seeds)”; *vé-m-nāšt* “I extinguished” vs. *é-m-nāšt* “I seated.” Sometimes the same verb root may occur both with and without a lexical preverb with no real difference in meaning: *dar-kaft ~ bekaft* “he fell.” There are two types of preverbs: type 1 (*ve(r)-, var-, dar-*) appears in all tenses and with negatives; type 2 (*e~i-*) appears only in the affirmative and only in non-durative forms (subjunctive, preterit and the perfects). Note the use of *e~i-* in the affirmative imperative (*í-gi* “buy!” *é-parθ* “ask!”) and preterit (*í-m-gift, é-m-parθā*), but not in the durative (i.e., present and imperfect) tenses: (present) *gir-un-e, parθ-un-e*, or negatives of any tense (preterit affirmative/negative: *í-m-gift/ná-m-gift, é-m-parθā/ná-m-parθā*). Although both types of preverbs have precedents elsewhere (cf. Māzanderāni, Vafsi where preverbs only appear in non-duratives; and Gilaki, Zefra’i, Gorāni, Tāleši, where the preverb appears in all tenses, no NWI language beyond Isfj. and three or four immediate neighbors seems to have both types).

The preverbs *i-* and *e-* actually seem to be one preverb whose forms alternate before high and low vowels of the verb root respectively, as the following contrast shows: *í-ni* “sit!” vs. *é-nān* “seat!” Type 2 preverbs only appear in a few



roots: (before high vowels) *í-gi(r)* “take,” *í-ni* “sit,” *í-owθ* “sleep,” (before low vowels) *é-de* “give” *é-ne* “put,” *é-nān* “seat,” *é-band* “hit,” *é-parθ* “ask” (see also *Diachronics* above).

*Negation.* *né-* ~ *ná-* comes just before the stem in all present forms and the intransitive preterit (*dar-né-k-un-e* “I don’t fall,” *né-reθā-un* “I didn’t arrive”), but the subject marker (Set<sub>2</sub>) in the transitive preterit comes between *né-* and the stem: *ná-š-di* “she didn’t see” (the latter, however, may also be fronted out of the verb altogether: *vecé-š-ā né-di* “she didn’t see her child”). Negatives occur with type 1 preverbs in all tenses (*dar-né-gin-un-e* “I won’t light/kindle,” *ve-né-roθā-un* “I didn’t get up”). Since the negative particle suppresses both *be-* (subj. *bé-frāš-un/né-frāš-un* “that I sell/not sell”) and type 2 preverbs in those tenses, where they occur, verbs with different preverbs (and hence different meanings) merge in the negative: *bé-gir-* “catch/grab” and *í-gir-* “buy/get” both yield the negative forms *né-gir-un-e* “I don’t catch/buy.” The negative imperative is formed with either *mé-* ~ *má-* (*mé-vāid* “don’t say!” *dar-mé-ki* “don’t fall!”) or *né-* ~ *ná-* (*ná-koš* “don’t kill!”)

*Non-finite forms.* Infinitives consist of (preverb) + past stem + *-án*: *vāt-án* “to say,” *dar-kaft-án* “to fall,” *und-án* “to come.” The *-ā* of a past stem merges with the *-a* of the infinitive: *kešā* > *keš-án* “to pull.” Monosyllabic roots ending in a vowel usually retain an original *-z~d~δ* in the stem before the infinitive ending: *še-*, *dā-*, *be-*, also *um(o)-* > *še-δ-an* “to go,” *dā-d-an* “to give,” *be-δ-an* “to be,” *und-an* “to come” (< *um-d-an*). The infinitives in Ḥabib Borjiān’s fieldwork are exclusively formed with the ending *-āmun*, but this formation is not found in other sources (but see xxii, below for examples of this formation: *vāt-āmun*, *dar-kaft-āmun*, etc.). This formation some-times also includes the (unstressed) non-durative marker *be-* in some cases: (*b-ārt-āmun* “to bring,” *b-irint-āmun* “to buy,” but *paxt-āmun* “to cook,” *cint-āmun* “to pick,” *reθā-mun* < *reθā-āmun* “to arrive,” *ve-roθā-mun* < *ve-roθā-āmun* “to rise, get up,” *i-niš-t-āmun* “to sit”), and in some cases this formation is based on the present root: *ve-gir-āmun* “to pick up.”

The past participle consists of (preverb)/*be-* + past stem + *-é* after consonants (*dar-kaft-é* “fallen”), but the final *-ā* of the stem merges with the *-é* of the participle to form *-á*: *be-* + *reθā* + *é* > *be-reθá* “arrived.” The present participle consists of (preverb) + pres. root + *-andé*: *bar-andé* “winning, winner.”

*Tense markers.* General comments. a) The present and imperfect are formed with a suffixed, unstressed *-e*, also called the durative marker (pres.: *band-ún-*



*e*, *band-í-e*, “I hit, you hit,” etc.; imperf.: *ārté-d-e* “you used to bring,” *še-nd-e* “they used to go”). The suffix *-e* remains on the verb when  $\text{Set}_2$  is moved off past transitive verbs to the object, e.g., *xorté-m-e* “I used to eat” vs. *nun-om xort-e* “I used to eat bread,” *engliθi-šun-am xunt-e* “they used to study English, too” (for a fuller discussion of the suffixed *-e* and the formation of the durative tenses, see [xxi. PROVINCIAL DIALECTS](#)). b) The prefix *bé-* is used to form the IsfJ. subjunctive, optative, imperative, preterit and perfect tenses, but it is suppressed when either type of preverb accompanies the verb root (*bé-gartā* “he walked around,” but *vé-gartā* “he returned”; *bí-š-gi* “he caught, grabbed” but *í-š-gi* “he took”), or when the verb is in the negative (see above). It has four alternate forms, *bé-*, *bí-*, *bú-*, and *b-*, of which *bé-* is the most common: *bé-m-ārt* “I brought,” *bé-brun* “that I carry,” *bé-rew* “sweep!,” but *bí-arzu* “that it be worth,” *b-ārun* “that I bring.” The conditions for *bú-* are not totally clear: *búvā* “say!”; (Yarshater) *bévāun* “that I say,” but (Kalbāsi, Borjiān, Stilo) *búvāun*.

*Person endings.* As with all Central dialects and most Northwestern Iranian languages, IsfJ. makes a crucial distinction between intransitive and transitive conjugations in all past tenses (see [Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#)). The intransitive forms in all tenses of the past system (preterit, imperfect, and the various perfects) are formed by placing the  $\text{Set}_1$  endings consistently after the past stem (preterit: *i-nišd-own*, imperfect: *nišd-own-e*, pres. perf.: *i-nišdówn*, past perf.: *i-nišde-bo*). The tenses of the transitive past system, however, differ from intransitive verbs in three important ways: a) all past transitive tenses are formed with  $\text{Set}_2$  endings rather than  $\text{Set}_1$ ; b) the  $\text{Set}_2$  endings come *before* the past stem in the preterit and the perfect tenses; c) the  $\text{Set}_2$  endings are much more mobile than  $\text{Set}_1$ . Note the difference in the preterit conjugation of intransitive *tej-/tejā* “I ran, you ran, etc.” vs. transitive *puš-/pušd* “I put on, you put on, etc.” ([Example 3](#)).

The position of the  $\text{Set}_2$  endings of the past system is variable according to tense: (1) between the prefixed *bé-* (or the preverb) and the verb stem in the preterit, as we see with *bé-m-pušd* above, or (2) between the verb stem and the suffixed *-e* in the imperfect (*pušdé-m-e* “I would put on”). The position of  $\text{Set}_2$  endings seems to depend on the stress placement within the verb and will therefore differ not only according to tense but also according to affirmative versus negative forms due to different stress patterns; that is, they move to that syllable within the verb where the stress falls. The two types of crucial examples that show this phenomenon are those cases where the stress and  $\text{Set}_2$  endings follow the stem in the affirmative but precede the stem in the



negative: a) (affirmative/negative) imperfect: *pušdé-m-e/ná-m-pušd-e*, and b) the forms of the “to want” (all tenses, see *Modals* below): (present) *gú-m-e/ná-m-gu-e* “I want/I don’t want,” (past) past: *gumā'-m-e/ná-m-gumā* “I wanted/I didn’t want.” Note that since *bé-* is always stressed, the stress pattern in other past transitive tenses does not change and the Set<sub>2</sub> endings are consistently placed before the stem: Preterit: *bé-m-pušd/ná-m-pušd*, pres. perf.: *bé-m-pušd-e/ná-m-pušd-e*, past perf.: *bé-m-pušd-e bu/ná-m-pušd-e bo*. Stress is not a determining factor for intransitive verbs as we saw above since the position of Set<sub>1</sub> is always constant.

Important points in the IsfJ. Set<sub>1</sub> endings are: (1) the 1st sg. *-un*, ending in *-n* rather than *-m*, is common within Central dialects (Ardestāni, Meyma'i *-un*; Gazi, Sedehi, K̄vānsāri, Hamadāni Jewish [q.v.] *-ān*; Delijāni *-on*; Kermāni Jewish *-in*), but other Central dialects have a final *-m* (or no nasal); (2) the 2nd sg. *-e* changes to *-i* when followed by the durative marker *-e*: subjunctive *bé-parθ-e* “that you ask” but present *parθ-i-e* “you ask” (= ask-2sg-durative); (3) the 3rd sg. *-u* is typical of K̄vānsāri, Gazi, Sedehi, Zefra'i, Vānišāni, K̄uri, (*-o* in Kermāni Jewish) and of several other, but not of all, Central dialects (note also Gōrāni *-o~u*).

*Fronting*. As shown in the previous section, Set<sub>2</sub> endings indicating the subject of transitive verbs are located in a different position in the preterit (*be-m-xo* “I ate”) than they are in the imperfect (*xorté-m-e* “I used to eat”). Set<sub>2</sub> endings are actually quite mobile and the general (but optional) tendency is for Set<sub>2</sub> to move forward in a sentence, hence the term “Fronting.” Fronting indicates that the Set<sub>2</sub> person endings move off the verb in the various past tenses of transitives to a preceding word, often the direct object (but never to the subject): (preterit) *bí-š-gi* “he caught” > *xurúθ-oš bí-gi* “he caught the rooster”; (imperfect) *xorté-m-e* “I used to eat” > *nāštāi-m-em xort-e* “I used to eat my breakfast,” (present perfect) *guθpand-omun né-gifte* “we haven’t gotten a sheep.” As the above example (*nāštāi-m-em*) also shows, fronting of a Set<sub>2</sub> ending to a word that already has a Set<sub>2</sub> possessive marker is also possible (see also *še-š-om baθ* above), as opposed to other languages such as Hamadāni Jewish or Vafsi where this is not allowed.

As mentioned above, direct objects more commonly occur without *-(r)ā* in the past tenses than in the present tenses: *mun-od θedā baθ* “you called me.” The reason for the lack of *-(r)ā* in the past tenses is that fronting is the most common way of forming sentences with past transitive verbs and it seems that



the fronting of  $Set_2$  to the object is incompatible with  $-(r)\bar{a}$  marking of the object: *neθf-e xorāk-om bexorte-bo* “I had eaten half of the food.” When the person ending of a past tense transitive verb remains with the verb or is fronted to any element other than the direct object, it is then completely permissible for the object to be marked by  $-(r)\bar{a}$ : (remaining on verb) *xār-ā be-šun-bart* “they took the donkey away,” *rassi-ā piš-oš ve-m-vāte-bo* “I had told him the truth”; (fronted to element other than direct object) *pil-oš-ā še-š-om dā* (= *pil<sub>4</sub>-oš<sub>3</sub>-ā še<sub>5</sub>-š<sub>6</sub>-om<sub>1</sub> dā<sub>2</sub>*) “I<sub>1</sub> gave<sub>2</sub> his<sub>3</sub> money<sub>4</sub> to<sub>5</sub> him<sub>6</sub>.” Since fronting is always optional, there are very often alternate forms of a sentence with  $-(r)\bar{a}$  (and no fronting) and without  $-(r)\bar{a}$  (but with fronting): *gorgā guθpandā-rā be-šun-xo* ~ *gorgā guθpandā-šun boxo* “The wolves ate the sheep (pl.),” *kudum keđe-rā xoc-aš be-š-sāxt?* ~ *kudum keđe-š xoc-aš be-sāxt?* “which house did he himself build?” *mun un-ā bi-m-di* “I saw him” ~ *mun un-om ne-di* “I didn’t see him.” It should be noted that there are cases where  $-(r)\bar{a}$  does co-occur with the  $Set_2$  in the past tense (e.g., *nāhār-om-ā be-š-ārt* “he brought my lunch”), but the first  $Set_2$  (*-om*) in this sentence has a possessive function and the  $Set_2$  as subject (agent) marker (*-š*) remains on the verb as in other examples above and thus no fronting occurs in this sentence.

Note also that there is a somewhat common phenomenon for the subject (agent)  $Set_2$  marker to be repeated both on the verb and fronted as well (with no meaning change): *ongoθ-om-om bi-m-birint* (= *ongoθ<sub>4</sub>-om<sub>3</sub>-om<sub>1</sub> bi-m<sub>1</sub>-birint<sub>2</sub>*) “I<sub>1</sub> cut<sub>2</sub> my<sub>3</sub> finger<sub>4</sub>,” in *perhan-e qašang-ā eδ kuvāy-dun bi-d-irint* “(from) where have you bought this beautiful shirt/dress?” The use of 2nd sg. (*-d*) and 2nd pl. (*-dun*) endings in the latter sentence may either be a slip of the tongue or may show the speaker’s ambivalence over how formally he/she should address the hearer.

$Set_2$  may also move farther forward in the sentence over one or more words, a phenomenon that the present author calls “Distance Fronting”: *ye bāq-ošun dewr-e un ziāretgā bé-sāte* “they built a garden around that shrine,” *θib-ā-šun eδ daraxt bicint* “they picked the apples off the tree,” *to-šun eδ keđe ki karte* “they have kicked you out of the house,” *pil-om ruδ eδene kam še-š da-bo* “I had given her (too) little money on Friday.”

There is a strong tendency in Isfj. for the Fronted  $Set_2$  marker to attach to the direct object, regardless of the position of the object in the clause, hence the occurrences of Distance Fronting mentioned above. This is only a strong tendency, however, and these endings do not obligatorily move to the object.



They may also attach to various other words such as adverbs or prepositional phrases: *ar-vaxt-om bedi* “whenever I saw (him), ...” *mun-ā tu zahmat-oš xoθ* “he threw me into trouble,” but the latter type is somewhat rare, and it is much more common for the  $Set_2$  endings to remain on the verb when no direct object is present: *xód-oš bé-d-engāšt?* “did you speak with him?” A fuller description of fronting is given under the entry on the Hamadāni Jewish dialect (see [HAMADĀN ix](#)) and a further discussion of the tendency of  $Set_2$  endings to attach to the direct object is also given under GAZI.

*Notes on tenses, aspects, moods.* (1) The usual imperative is built with *bé-*/preverbs and the bare root in the singular (the plural imperative and subjunctive are identical): *béxuθ!*/*béxuθid* “throw!” *vár-māl!*/*vár-mālid* “flee!” Another common imperative formation uses the 2nd singular ending (identical to the subjunctive; see also GAZI for this formation) and occurs with roots consisting of only one consonant and with all causatives: *bé-š-e!* “go!” *é-d-e!* “give!” *bé-tāy-n-e!* “chase!” *bé-yuš-n-e!* “boil (it)!” There are also irregular imperative formations: a) forms of “to be” (be1: *b-i!* “be!” be3: *dar-b-i!* “be!” and *bé-b-i!* “become!” [for the numbers of verbs, see below]), and b) built either on the imperative of “be” (for the numbers of “to be” verbs, see below): *dār-b-i!* “have!” *δun-b-i!* (usually realized as *δúmbi*) “know!” or on the 3rd pers. subjunctive of “be”: *gu-d-bu!* “want!” *bésā-d-bu!* “be able!” (see Modals for the formation of the latter two verbs). Also irregular is “come”: *bu ki!* “come out!” (= *b-u*, but present: *y-un-e* “I come”); (2) progressive forms are built with “have” as their auxiliary verb as in colloquial Persian (*ye rubāy aδ dey dārt-oš še, ye xurúθ-oš bidi dāru dun var-cinúve* “A fox was going out of a village (and) he saw a rooster was pecking at seeds”), but they seem to be encountered mostly from elicited sentences and not often in the actual texts, which shows the pattern may be a recent borrowing from Persian. (3) The optative (expressing wishes, used mostly for blessings and curses) occurs only in the 3rd singular and is formed with the optative marker *-ā*, in which case the 3rd sg. *-u* is suppressed (examples from Yarshater): *xedā bé-š-keš-ā-Ø* “may God kill him,” *xedā ’omr-ot še t-ā-Ø* “may God give you (long) life.” Other persons of the optative are expressed with the subjunctive: (Yarshater) *elāhi bémbereun*, *elāhi bémbere*, but *elāhi bémbereā* “God, may I, you, he die!” Note that in purely subjunctive uses, the 3rd sg. *-u* remains: *gumā-š-e be-mber-u* “he was about to (lit: wanted to) die.”

*To be.* Isfj. has three “to be” verbs (see [Table 3](#)): be1, the usual copula, is identical to the  $Set_1$  endings on verbs (see [Table 1](#)), but it never takes stress:



*mun dozd-un* “I am a thief,” *xab-un* “I am good,” *to mariδ-e* “you are sick,” *in aθm-e eθbed-u* “this is a white horse,” *kār cetowr-u?* “how is work?” negative: *vaδ now* “it isn’t bad.” Be2, *eθθu*, used for existence, emphasis and sometimes location, is probably the Iranian root “to stand” having merged with the alternate copula root *hast-* of other Iranian languages: *cerā guše divār eθθu* “the light is in the corner of the wall.” Be3, *der-u*, is used to express location (*yun der-un* “I am here,” *ali kuvā der-u?* “where is Ali?” *pil-omun piš-e mardom der-u* “our money is with (other) people,” *ar sāl vis ru der-end* “every year they are (there, here, with us, etc.) for twenty days,” *keδe der-bun/ne-der-bun* “I was/wasn’t at home,” *be-fékr-e θebā né-dar-boend* “they weren’t in thoughts of tomorrow.” Be1 may also assume the functions of be2 and be3, e.g., existence (*jir-e un ku ye cešme-u ge . . .* “there is a spring at the foot of that mountain that ,Ä¶,”) and location (*pošd-e kuy-u* “it is behind the mountain”).

*Become* (see Table 4) is built with the forms of “to be1” (except for the present tense which has its own root, *b-*, also derived from “to be”) plus the tense-aspect markers *-e* and *bé-*: pres. *di-di xaθθe b-í-e* “you get tired very quickly,” *ma:lum b-ú-e* “it will be (become) clear,” *bele bé-bo-y* “you got big! (i.e., you grew up!),” *pāre bé-bd-e* “it has become torn,” *bihuš bé-bd-e bo-wn* “I had become unconscious” (see also *Passive* below).

*Modals*. “Want” and “can” are indirect (or dative) verbs, signifying “it is wanting/possible to me,” in which the person is expressed with Set<sub>2</sub> endings. Tenses other than the present take the 3rd person of “to be” as an auxiliary (see Imperative above): “can” (pres.: *béšā-m/néšā-m*, *béšā-d*, *béšā-š*, etc.; past: *béšā-m-bo/néšā-m-bo*, *béšā-d-bo*, etc.): *béšāš béxunu* “she can read,” *néšām xód-e šemā bešun* “I can’t go with you,” *kāški béšām-bo ye kāri berā-š békerun* “I wish I could do something for him,” *néšām-bo bíun* “I wasn’t able to come”; “want” (pres.: *gu-m-e/ná-m-gue*, *gu-d-e*, *gu-š-e*, etc.; past: *gumā-m-e/na-m-gumā*, *gumā-d-e*, etc.): *gu-m-e xód-ot béngārun* “I want to speak with you,” *gumā-š-e be-mber-u* “he wanted to die.” “Must” is an impersonal, invariable past form of “want” (*gumā-bo*) with no Set<sub>2</sub> endings and is used in both present and past senses (*gumā-bo de timān é-tun* “I must give 10 tomans”). *zun/zunā* “to know” also has the meaning “can”: *zunā-m é-t-un* “I was able to give.”

*Causatives and passives*. The causative marker is *-(e)n/(e)nā* added to the present root of the non-causative: *kelāš-/kelāšn-* “itch/scratch,” *bíyušā* “it boiled (intrans.)” > *bišyušnā* “he boiled (trans.),” *gumāše mún-ā bétarsenu* “she wanted to scare me,” *béθuðu* “let it burn” > *béθunne* “burn (it)! (trans.),” *bémθunnā* “I burned (it),” *m-ofne* “don’t put (him) to sleep!” (The latter form



seems to be an exception, built on the past stem.) The passive is formed analytically as in Persian with the past participle and “to become” (see [Table 4](#)): *bar bas(t)e-buve* “the door closes,” *in lebāθ xab dašte nebue* “these clothes will not be sewn well,” *qand-eš emarté nebue* “the sugar won’t break,” *pādāši bay-aš dā-bebo* “a reward was given to him.”

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Roubène Abrahamian, *Dialectes des Israélites de Hamadan et d’Isphahan et dialecte de Baba Tahir*, Paris, 1936.

Harold W. Bailey “Modern Western Iranian: Infinitives in Gazī and Soī,” *TPS*, 1935, pp. 73-74.

Ḥabib Borjiān, *Ganjina-ye guyešhā-ye Ešfahān*, Farhangestān-e zabān o adab-e fārsi series, forthcoming. Irān Kalbāsi, *Fārsi-e ešfahāni*, Tehran, 1991.

Idem, *Guyeš-e Kalimiān-e Ešfahān*, Tehran, 1994.

Pierre Lecoq, “Les dialectes du centre de l’Iran,” in Rüdiger Schmitt, ed., *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*, Wiesbaden, 1989, pp. 313-26.

David Neil MacKenzie, “Jewish Persian from Isfahan,” *JRAS*, 1968, pp. 68-75.

Manfred Mayrhofer, “Vorgeschichte der iranischen Sprachen; Uriranisch,” in Rüdiger Schmitt, ed., *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*, Wiesbaden, 1989, pp. 4-24.

Rüdiger Schmitt, “Die altiranischen Sprachen im Überblick,” *ibid.*, pp. 25-31.

Lidia P. Smirnova, *Isfaxanskii govor*, Nauka, Moscow, 1978.

A. Sohrābi-Anāraki, *Vāža-nāma-ye Anāraki*, Mashhad, 1994.

Donald Stilo, unpublished field notes collected in Isfahan, 1964.



Ehsan Yarshater, unpublished field notes collected in Isfahan, 1970, kindly provided to the author.

Valentin A. Zhukovskiĭ, *Materialy dlya izucheniya persidskikh narechiĭ*, Petrograd, 1888-1922, II; repr. as *Materials for the Study of Iranian Dialects*, 3 vols. in 1, Tehran, 1976.