



KHOLOSI

KHOLOSI (K̲OLOŞI), an Indic (Indo-Aryan) language spoken in the villages of K̲oloş and Gotāv in a single valley between low mountains in Bastak district, western Hormozgān province. This language, found more than 600 km away from its nearest Indic neighbor in Iran (Jaḍgāli), is known in the literature from a single article (Anonby and Mohebbi Bahmani) and subsequent field research in the town of K̲oloş (Mohebbi Bahmani et al.; Taheri-Ardali, field notes 2016; Nourzaei, field notes, 2017). The Iranian National Census of 2016 counts 1,627 inhabitants for the villages of K̲oloş and Gotāv (1,123 and 504 respectively), which are linguistically homogenous. Along with Kholosi-speaking families living in nearby towns as well as cities in the wider region, the total number of speakers of the language may be estimated at about 1,800 people.

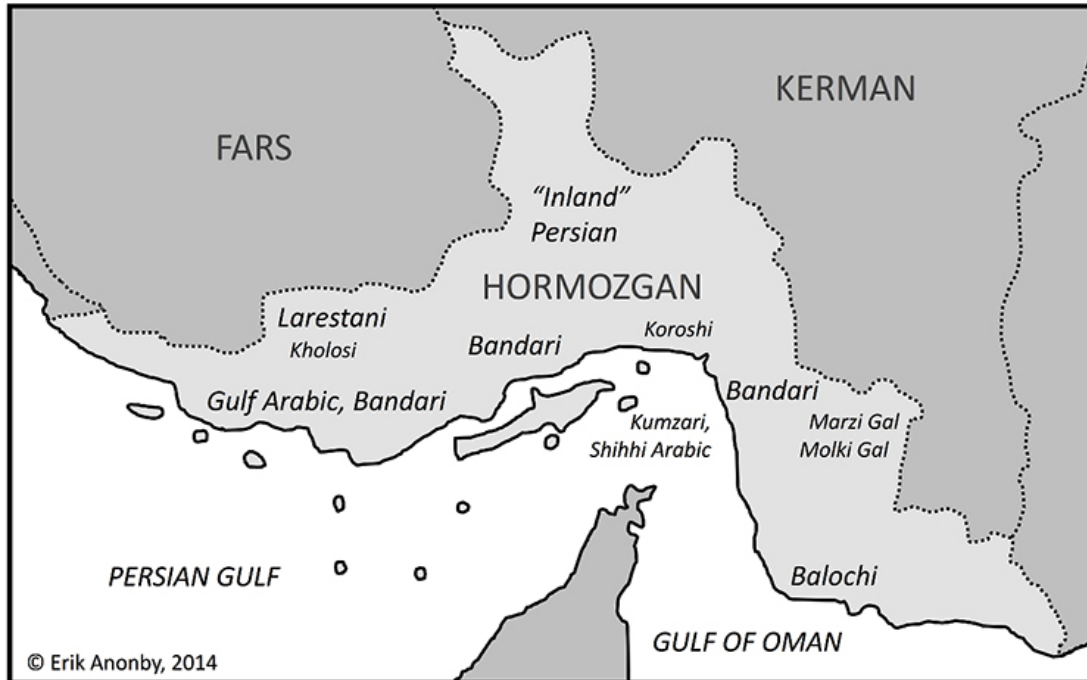


Figure 1. Kholosi in the linguistic context of Hormozgān province. Courtesy of Erik Anonby.

The precise origins of the Kholosi language community have not been established, but speakers maintain that their ancestors came from greater India (that is, the “Hindustan” of earlier times) many generations ago, perhaps two centuries before the present. Although they speak an Indic language, Kholosi speakers are not associated with so-called “gypsy” language communities in Iran (known in Iran under labels such as Kowli, Luṭi, Mehtar, Jat) that speak Indic languages or Iranian languages with Indic jargons (see Rezai Baghbidi for an overview of these latter groups). While some younger Kholosi speakers recount a shipwreck as the point of entry into the region, Anonby and Mohebbi Bahmani raise the possibility of descent from pre-colonial “Bāni” merchant communities from India, or families in the service of the khans of cities near Koloṣ, such as Bastak to the north.

Anonby and Mohebbi Bahmani’s article presents some distinctive Kholosi words: *lō* ‘hair’, *āṛak* ‘knee’, *kozoro* ‘man’, *viyow* ‘child’, *nōk o* ‘small’, *poko* ‘one’, *pālai* ‘tie (v. tr.)’. This study also shows that Kholosi shares basic vocabulary (and associated sound changes) with surrounding varieties of the Iranian family, e.g., *domāḡ* ‘nose’, *akrab* ‘scorpion’, *barg* ‘leaf’, *lamer* ‘sand’, *awr* ‘cloud’, *fitak* ‘



whistling’. However, more of the basic vocabulary is clearly Indic: *kān* ‘ear’, *gēči* ‘neck’, *pēt* ‘stomach’, *haī* ‘hand’, *rāt* ‘blood’, *sap* ‘snake’, *sak o* ‘dry’, *kāro* ‘black’. In keeping with its reported origins in greater India in recent centuries, Kholosi appears to be aligned with Northwest Indic languages such as Sindhi and Kacchi, or even (as pointed out by Stéphane Goyette, personal communication, 2015) Lahnda, rather than Romani or Domari. However, a conclusive, in-depth classification within Indic has yet to be carried out.

In the phonological inventory, as sketched out in Anonby and Mohebbi Bahmani, Kholosi has retained elements of the retroflexed (or postalveolar) series well-known from Indic languages (see Cardona and Jain, pp. 28-31; Masica, p. 94). However, this series is reduced—possibly limited to *r* (e.g., *nāri* ‘throat’) and *ṛ* (*perono* ‘old [thing]’)—and historically unstable in the lexicon (e.g. *puni* ‘water’, cf. Sindhi *pāṇī*), and use of retroflexion appears to be synchronically variable among speakers. The typical Indic aspirated and implosive series are absent, and in their place is found a robust fricative series, more typical of Iranian languages, containing *f*, *v*, *s*, *z* and *x* (*sāf* ‘all’, *vazzo* ‘big’, *xāz* ‘grass’) as well as the segments [β], [ḍ] and [θ] (*tā[β]esān* ‘summer’, *de[ḍ]ā* ‘older sister’, *ko[θ]oro* ‘dog’), which are allophonic variants of *b*, *d* and *t*; for the voiced stops *b* and *d*, this inter- (and post-)vocalic softening process is found in many other languages of the Zagros linguistic area in southwest Iran (cf. Anonby, pp. 51-55; **BAKTIĀRI DIALECT**). Other salient phonological phenomena are pervasive vowel nasalization, likely the allophonic realization of word-final *n* post-vocalically, and pitch-accent rather than stress or lexical tone as the basis of the prosodic system.

The grammar of the language has not been studied in detail, but Taheri-Ardali’s and Nourzaei’s field notes confirm a similar mixture of Indic and Iranian input in this domain. For example, associative constructions may be zero-marked (*velāt mā* ‘our village’), but linking with a segmental *ežāfa* (q.v.) is also common (*rūstā-ye xolos* ‘village of Koloş’), and a genitive case marker *-ī* appears with proper nouns (*mūsā-īmāw* ‘Musa’s mother’). The most common complementizer is *jō* (*zamānējōvanen* ‘the time that they came’), but Persian-type *ke* is also used, especially in fixed expressions (*zamānē ke denyā ečaw* ‘the time that he was born’).

The co-existence of Indic and Iranian structures at all levels of the language can be observed in the following extract of an oral text by Hasan Şabuḥi (2018):



hēk ō az marāsemhā-ē qadīmī jō hatem marāsem-ē kešāvarzī ... / faqat tanhā kām-ē hatem xallo vedāren-ē. / va hē zamān-ē šorū-tīyaw mowqē jō xallo vedāren az zamān-ē vīyowkā vanen madraset-ē. / va baškār qadīm bā gāv-āhan kardayaw...

“One of the old traditions that we have is the tradition of farming. / The single activity we have is barley planting. / And the time that we start planting barley is from the time the children go to school. / And in the past, tilling was done using the ox-pulled iron plow...”

In contrast to many other areas of Hormozgān Province, where standard Persian is replacing the regional languages as the mother tongue of the younger generation, the Kholosi language is still spoken as a first language by all members of the community. However, the structure of the language is changing quickly; younger speakers interweave Persian and local Iranian linguistic features so pervasively that their speech gives a first impression of being an Iranian variety, rather than Indic, until further analysis is carried out.

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