



KHUZESTAN VIII. DIALECTS

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viii. Dialects

The local dialects of Khuzestan, as elsewhere in Iran, are under severe pressure from the standard language. Factors threatening their existence are the increase in literacy, the spread of the mass media, including the Internet, and economic growth. The last mentioned has encouraged the sedentarization of tribes, the migration from village to town, and large-scale immigration into the province of population from other regions of the country. One must note as well the population displacement due to the Iran-Iraq War (see IRAQ vii) and the Islamic revolution of 1979. All these factors act to reduce the numbers of speakers of local dialects.

Before the large-scale immigration that took place during the 20th century and after, the population of Khuzestan consisted for the most part of two linguistic groups: speakers of Arabic, who lived in the area stretching from the Persian Gulf and the Shatt al-Arab (Šaṭṭ al-‘Arab) river inland to the city of Ahvāz, and speakers of Iranian dialects, who inhabited the area to the northwest and the foothills and mountains of the Zagros range. Khuzestani Arabic is of the Persian Gulf type, not fundamentally different from Kuwaiti Arabic.

Though no linguistic survey of Khuzestan has been undertaken, the dialects spoken by the Iranian folk of the province appear to be of two basic types: Dezfuli-Šuštari (D-Š; see [Dezful ii. Dezfuli and Šuštari](#)), spoken in those two



cities, and Baḳtiāri (see [Baḳtiāri tribe ii. The Baḳtiāri Dialect](#)), spoken both by the tribes who winter in the lowlands of Khuzestan and by the folk settled in villages and towns such as Āqājāri, Masjed Solaymān, and Rāmhormoz. Of these dialects, only D-Š has been described in detail (MacKinnon, 1974). There are some relatively full accounts of tribal Baḳtiāri (Lorimer, 1922; idem, 1930; idem, 1954-63; idem, 1964), though these are dated in their linguistic approach. Numerous publications containing Baḳtiāri proverbs and verse as well as lexicons have been and continue to be published in Iran. None of the Baḳtiāri or Baḳtiāri-like dialects spoken by local settled people have been well investigated, and the relationships among them are not known, nor are their relationships to the tribal dialects clear. It is also difficult to estimate how many inhabitants of the province speak one or another of the two dialect types as a first language, though they number probably in the few hundred thousands.

[Dezful](#) and Šuštar, some 50 kilometers apart, appear to be speech islands, suggesting that D-Š was once spoken more widely than at present, but at some point came to be isolated in these two locations, possibly because of the immigration of Baḳtiāri speakers or at least growth in their numbers. That D-Š has borrowed two Arabic pharyngeal consonants, /ħ/ and /ʕ/, and maintains the phonetic distinction between /q/ and /g/ suggests that the two speech groups, D-Š and Arabic, had long, close contact; this too would suggest that D-Š was once spread over a wider geographical area than now.

Baḳtiāri and D-Š exhibit all the features of the Southwestern type (Sundermann, pp. 106-13), which define Persian historically. Both belong to the Southern Lori group (see [Lori Dialects](#)). Baḳtiāri and D-Š, are quite similar in their syntax, morphology, and phonological development, and, whatever their origins, must have been in close contact for centuries. Like all Lori dialects, they are firmly in the Modern Persian mold (see below). For more detailed treatments of the two dialect groups, see the above-mentioned articles, but some of their more notable features are summarized here.

Phonology. Historically, /u/ became /i/ before non-strident dentals: Baḳt(iāri), D-Š *bid* “he was” (Pers. *bud*), *pil* “money” (Pers. *pul*), but *ruz* “day”; /ā/ rose to /ō/, /u/ before nasals: Baḳt., D-Š *šum* “dinner” (Pers. *šām*), but Baḳt. *hona* “house” (Pers. *kāna*) (Lorimer 1922, p. 126); the back *majhul* vowel, i.e., the tense /ō/, rose to merge with /u/ in both Baḳt. and D-Š: Baḳt. *pust*, D-Š *puss* “skin” (Pers. *pust*). In Šuštari and in at least some Baḳtiāri-like dialects, e.g., Rāmhormozi (known locally as Rumezi), the front *majhul* vowel, tense /ē/, rose



to merge with /i/: Šuštari, Rāmhormozi *zir* “under,” as in Persian (author’s notes), but not in Dezfuli and other Baḳtiāri varieties: Dezfuli, Baḳt. *bēd* “willow” (Pers. *bid*). Postvocalic voiced stops weaken in both Baḳt. and D-Š. Thus, the sequences /āb/, /ab/ have become Baḳt. /au/, Šuštari /ō/, Dezfuli /ö/: *au*, *ō*, *ö* “water” (Pers. *āb*), *šau*, *šō*, *šö* “night” (Pers. *šab*). Postvocalic /d/ often disappears: Baḳt. *beār* “awake” (Pers. *bidār*).

Baḳtiāri shares certain phonological features with Northern Lori, including the retention of the front *majhul* vowel /ē/, and the change of /k/ to /h/, which is the rule in Northern Lori but sporadic in Baḳtiāri: Baḳt. *hin* “blood” (Pers. *kun*), but Baḳt. *keridan* “to buy” (Pers. *karidan*). D-Š retains /k/ in all cases. In three and only three words in Baḳtiāri the sequence /ft/ becomes /(h)d/: Baḳt. *gired*, “he took,” *god* “he said,” and *raəd* “he went” (Pers. *gereft*, *goft*, and *raft*), exactly as in Northern Lori (all examples from Lorimer 1964, pp. 130-31).

Morphology. The noun morphological categories of Baḳtiāri and Dezfuli-Šuštari are virtually identical to each other and to those of Standard Colloquial Persian (SCP), though the devices vary somewhat. The principal noun markers are suffixes: (1) plural: Baḳt., D-Š stressed *-(h)ā*, *-un*, Baḳt. *-(g)al* (SCP *-hā*, *-un*); (2) definite object: Baḳt., D-Š unstressed *-(n)a* (SCP *-[r]o*); (3) *ežāfa*: unstressed *-e*, as in Persian; (4) the so-called “indefinite article”: unstressed *-i*, *-ē*, as in Persian; (5) the antecedent of a relative clause: unstressed *-i*, *-ē* as in Persian; (6) contrast: stressed Baḳt. *-(i)ka*, D-Š *-(a)ka* (SCP stressed *-ē*), used to contrast a noun so marked with some other noun either previously mentioned in the discourse or understood.

In their verbal structure and morphology Baḳtiāri and Dezfuli-Šuštari are close to one another and to SCP. Both, like SCP, use a verbal prefix to indicate progressivity, *be-* in D-Š, *i-* in Baḳt. (Pers. *mi-*). To indicate subjunctive Baḳt. uses *be-* as does Persian; D-Š uses the bare stem: *beḳarom* “I eat,” *kwarom* “that I eat” (SCP *miḳoram*, *bokoram*). Baḳtiāri and Dezfuli-Šuštari have a transitive past tense with no trace of ergativity (see [ERGATIVE CONSTRUCTION](#)). Unlike Persian, they form perfect tenses based on the past tense followed by forms of “to be.” Thus: D-Š *goftom a*, *gofti a* “I, you have said,” *goftom bi* “I had said,” Baḳt. *guhdom a*, *bi* “I have, had said.” Both groups have an inchoative suffix, not present in SCP, indicating change of state: Baḳt. *rēsiste* “flowed” (Lorimer 1955, p. 105; Pers. *riḳta*), D-Š *perhess* “he jumped” (Pers. *parhid*). Both have an optative suffix *-ā* not present in SCP: Baḳt. *zinā* “may it strike” (Lorimer, 1955, p. 96), D-Š *vanhām* “may I be placed.”



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