



KOJUR II. LANGUAGE

KOJUR

ii. Language

Two major languages are spoken in Kojur: the native [Caspian dialect](#) and a Kurdish dialect spoken by the Kurdish immigrants (see [KOJUR i](#), above). The Kurdish dialect of Kojur remains unstudied; a glossary compiled by [Jacques de Morgan](#) (pp. 200-43) seems to be the only study published so far.

The Caspian dialect spoken in Kojur is structurally Mazandarani with some divergence in phonology, morphology, and syntax. This has led to a low degree of mutual intelligibility between Kojuri and the Mazandarani proper spoken in the eastern and central plains of Mazandaran, that is, [Āmol](#), [Bābol](#), [Šāhi](#), [Sāri](#), and their environs. The low intelligibility may also be due to vocabulary, but this is beyond the scope of this article.

The divergence of Kojuri from Mazandarani proper may be explained by its position at the confluence of two identified dialect chains: (1) along the lines of latitude, the Central Caspian language group (consisting of [Kalārestāqi](#) and [Tonekāboni](#)), transitional between Mazandarani and [Gilaki](#) (see [Stilo; Borjian, 2010](#)); (2) along the lines of longitude, the Central [Alborz](#) linguistic area, extending from Kojur southward to [Yuš](#) in the Nur valley, thence to [Velātru](#) and northern [Jājrud](#) and [Karaj](#) valleys on the north side of Tehran ([Borjian, 2012](#); [idem, 2013](#)). Some of the affinities will be discussed in the sketch of the grammar, below.



The linguistic data in this study are mainly from Kandelus (at lat 36°19' N, long 51°34' E), the uppermost village in the Miḵsāz valley of Zānusrostāq county, south-central Kojur. The Kandelusi data consist of the material compiled in 'Ali-Aṣḡar Jahāngiri's monograph on his home village, the poems of Farhud Jalāli Kandelusi (2001-11) on audiotapes, and the fieldwork of the present author. For the sake of comparison, I have also gleaned from the sub-dialects of two other Kojuri villages: Upper Firuzkalā (lat 36°22' N, long 51°48' E) of K^voršidrostāq county, located 4 miles east of Kojur's administrative center (data from Qeyṣari) and Anārvar (lat 36°35' N, long 51 44' E), on the west of the Sisangān National Park on the Caspian littoral plain (data from Ḥosayni Andarud). The differences among Kandelusi, Firuzkalā'i, and Anārvari are sufficiently insignificant to group them together under a single Kojuri dialect of the Mazandarani language.

Phonology. Kojuri consonants are similar to Persian, except that /k g/ stay velar and /q/ is voiced fricative [ɣ] in all positions, and that /ž/ is absent. A morpho-phonological rule governing the verb is loss of the stem-initial voiced stops /g d/ when prefixed, for instance: *hite/hayte* (□ *ha-git-e*) "you took," *daištā* (□ *da-gišt-â*) "it stung," *butan* (□ *ba-gut-an*) "to say," *nayma* (□ *na-di-ma*) "I didn't see." A striking diachrony shared with the Central Alborz language group is OIr. **hw-* > *f-* in the stems *fəs-/fət-* "sleep" (cf. Yuši *fes-/xet-*, Velātru'i and Tabaroid dialects of Jājrud *fəs-/fət-*).

The vowels are /a e i ə â o u/. Each vowel may vary in quality when unstressed, while /u e i/ seem the most stable; /e/ is articulated within a range between the cardinal [e] and near-close [i], and is occasionally diphthongized in stressed position to [əj], as in *dénənə/dáynənə* "they give," *pe/pəy/pi* "behind, follow," *per/pi'r* "father," *ve/vi/vəy* (the third singular possessive pronoun). The unstressed oblique marker *-e/-i* (see below) alternates freely with its variant *-ə*, sometimes heard [əj].

The most unstable of all vowels is the lax, neutral /ə/, which may even vanish in the unstressed syllable; for instance, *f^hlík* "saliva," *b^hrār* "brother," *bák^hšə* "that it drag." Although /ə/ shows alternation with /e/ (especially next to sibilants, e.g., *še/šə* "self") and, less frequently, with /a/, its phonemic status is inferred from the minimal pairs like *šə* "drizzle" □ *še* "first milk" □ *ši* "husband"; *kəl* "blunt" □ *kel* "direction" □ *kal* "branch, bald"; *sərin* "the buttocks" □ *sarín* "head support." What is more, the final /ə/ is often realized, at a phonetic level, as [ɐ] (even [a]), which sounds like a distinct vowel, so much so that the native speakers, especially Jahāngiri, write it using the letter

alef, which the present author has retained as *â* in his transcription, leading to two free variations for some verbal suffixes in Table 2. Nevertheless, the allophonic status of [e] becomes evident in the rhyming position: *mâhravun=ə* [e] (he is compassionate) with *bəsâtə Mâzərun-rə* [ə] (he built Mazandaran). On the other hand, the phoneme /â/ [a] distinguishes itself from /ə/ by tending to round to [ɒ] and [ɔ].

Morphological stress is normally word-final in nouns and word-initial in verbs: *éšnâsəne* “you recognize,” *rútənə* “they would sell,” *dénəssənə* “they would know,” *námmə* “I don’t know.” The bond morphemes (separated here by a hyphen) and clitics (preceded by the symbol “=”) are unstressed.

Noun phrase. Modifiers. The oblique marker *-e* (free variant *-ə*) is suffixed to the head noun, in possessives (*âftâb-e ti* “sunbeam”), adjectives (*pir-e malə* “old bitch”), and objects of postpositions (see below). The connecting marker may drop (*pir âmsən* “old teacher,” *rōqan kalâ* “ghee pot,” *kahu zəmə* “blue-black son-in-law” (a curse), sometimes yielding compounds (*nu-sâl* “new year,” *xər-dim* “sunny side” *bâl-king* “elbow,” *alâ-bal* “fire blaze,” *ose-zan* “pregnant woman”). Longer arrays of modifiers may be constructed: *prâm go-ye gâləš* “herder of cows in a year that they are not expected to calf,” *še yak kila marji-e sar darâ* “he is [still] after his one kilo of lentils” (proverb).

Pronouns. Personal pronouns are declined in the three forms (Table 1) typical to Caspian languages. The possessive pronouns (*me, te, ve*, etc.) precede the head noun, e.g., *ame sere* “our house.”

In addition to the set in Table 1, there is an alternate set of possessive pronouns (*méne, téne, véne*, etc.), which *succeed* the head noun, contrary to other Mazandarani dialects that have this set, in which they precede head nouns categorically. Examples (in the material from Jalâli Kandelusi): *ketâb tene* “your book,” *dəl vene dəryo-ye jur* “his heart [is] like the sea,” *sele-raham améne sâl-bə-sâl=ə* “our get-togethers is from year to year.” Similar to other Caspian dialects, there is no enclitic pronoun in Kojuri, and syntactic forms such as *kâr te zâr=ə* (Pers. *kār-at zār ast*) “you are in trouble” must be mere Persianism.

The demonstrative pronoun *hayn* “this” agrees with Yuši (cf. Mazandarani proper *in*), *haynan* “these.”

The particle *še* (free variant, *šə*) functions as a reflexive pronoun (*še jur naimâ*



“I haven’t seen [anyone] like myself”) and possessive (*še rač* “one’s path,” *še javuni-rə yâd bakərdə* “he has forgotten his youth,” *še dām-â du-ye dāla angənə* “it throws its tail into the buttermilk [container]”). The same morpheme acts as a possessive pronoun when it succeeds the modified noun: *yâbu Mahmudbeyk-e še* “the mule is M.’s.”

Postpositions. Prepositions are the norm. The clitic *-(r)â* (or *-a*) marks the definite direct object as well as the indirect object: e.g., *və-râ bārvan gərd nayərnâ* “the pack-rope does not take hold of it”; *šə bāmāši kəta-a dā xāynâ* “he says prayers for his cat’s kitten”; *zəmâ zanmâr-e go-a məjənâ* “the son-in-law is walking after the mother-in-law’s cow” (expression); (ablative) *ke-râ tarsene, xədâ-râ?* “whom do you fear, God?”

The ablative is normally expressed by *-jâ/-jə* in Mazandarani proper, but not in Kojuri and its neighbors Kalārdašti of the Central Caspian group and the Tabaroid dialects of Jājrud basin. Instead, we find an instrumental function for *-jâ* in the Kojuri littoral dialect of Anārvar (*dəšo-ye jâ* “with syrup,” *mâl-e mardəm-e jâ* “with people’s money”) and in Kandelusi: *te gannəm=o dunə-ye jâ sir bavə* “he becomes full with your wheat and rice.”

An idiosyncratic postposition is *jur* “like” (also in Yuši, contrasting with general Mazandarani *vâri*), e.g., *vabâ-ye jur dāplətə dašt nāxəši* “like plague, illness has taken over the plains.”

For other postpositions, too, the marker *-e* is normally added to the object: *gannəm-e dāla* “in the wheat,” *mayij-ə gāle sar* “on the sack of raisins,” *bir-e bən* “under embers,” *kannâ pəš* “in front of the stairs,” *bâzâr lō* “at/near the market,” *âftâb-ə kəl* “under the sun,” *dara-e rem* “the bottom side of the gorge”; (Anārvari) *talâ-ye hamrâ gitəme* “we would seize with traps,” *te-vässe* “for you.”

Postpositions are omitted frequently: *ame kila o šunâ* “water goes [along] our ditch,” *sag-e tək varkâ-ye xun hâši bavə* “[if] the dog’s lip is weltering in lamb’s blood.”

Verb phrase: Verb morphemes. Regular past stems are derivable from the present stem by adding the past-stem formants *-i* (as in *əškâni-* “break”) or *-əs(s)* (as in *təlvəss-* “request,” cf. Pers. *ṭalab-id-*).

The present indicative and the imperfect stand out without a prefix, e.g., *šume* “we go,” *gətâ* “he would say, he was saying” *bərma katâ* “he was weeping.”



The perfective and subjunctive take the prefix *be-* or the preverbs *da-* and *hə-/hâ-*, as in *bakela* “that it scatter,” *dakefa* “that it fall,” *həkešən* “that they clad,” *hâkən* “pull off!” *baxârde* “you ate,” *hâkêrdâ* “he built.” An intrusive *-r-* shows between the prefix and the stem in some verbs, e.g., *hâršəm* “that I see,” *hərəs* “stand!” *hərəngot* “hung.” The negative marker *na-* suppresses other prefixes, as in *nakətə* “it didn’t fall.”

The present indicative is further distinguished by the durative morpheme *-ən-* (a remnant of Old Iranian participle marker **-ant-*) infix between the stem and the ending: *mâs-ən-e* “you (sg.) stick [it],” *eyš-ən-â* “he looks,” *šu-n-əne* “you (pl.) go,” *gə-n-ənə* “they say.” The present marker loses its vowel after the stems ending in *y*, *r*, *n* or vowels in the second person singular and third person singular; e.g., *nəməy-n-ə* “you reveal,” *na-yər-n-â* “it doesn’t grip,” *den-n-â* “he knows,” *de-n-â* “it gives,” *šu-n-â* “he goes,” *ko-n-ə* “it itches.” When, as a result, the singulars and plurals tend to merge, they are kept differentiated by epenthesis (e.g., *mun-n-â* “it resembles” □ *mun-n-ənâ* “they resemble”) even if the durative marker drops in the plural: *vâr-ene* “you (pl.) carry” (cf. *var-n-â* “he carries”). In the first person, an assimilation process takes place: *zamma* (□ *zan-* + *-n-* + *-ma*) “I hit,” *nammə* “I don’t know,” *kəmmə* “we do.”

The suffixes, as shown in Table 2, are of two types: (1) the set applicable to the indicative present, the preterit, and the imperfect, and (2) the set for the subjunctive present. The imperative takes no ending for the second person singular, e.g., *həniš* “sit!” *baku* “search!” *bel* “let!” and irregulars *bur* “go!” *bəra* “come!”

Two points are notable concerning the indicative set: (1) While the second and third person singular endings contrast (*e* and [*ɛ*] respectively), they both show the tendency to merge into *-ə* (e.g., *kənnə* “you do; he does”); this lack of differentiating may have been transmitted from the Central Caspian spoken in Kalārdašt across the Čālus River (see [KALĀRESTĀQ ii](#)). (2) The front vowel *-â* in the first singular and the third singular and plural contrasts with Mazandarani proper *-ə* but is akin to Yuši *-o* [â].

In line with Mazandarani proper, Kojuri shows no formal present perfect; the preterit tense also covers what would otherwise be expressed in Persian or English in the present perfect: *kijâ, tərə čī=ə te rang darəssâ, tərə te mâr bazu yâ mâhr daištâ?* “O girl, what has made you go pale? Has your mother beaten you or a snake has bitten you?”



Some verbs. The impersonal modal *venâ* “must” is followed by the subjunctive of the main verb, as in *venâ bosa* “it should rupture,” *rúte venə, xarâji ay kâštənə* “if selling was a must, they would then till [the land] leased.”

“Be” is expressed by two verbs: the substantive and the locative. The present copula equals personal endings shown in Table 2; it attaches to nominals without intervention of the present marker *-n-*. The past stem is *vi-*; e.g., *xâr=â* “it is good,” *tu aga kərčə aquz=e, mən valâ tək-ə čâqu=mâ* “if you are a fresh walnut, I am a knife with a bent tip”; *Mâzəndrun âli v’ə* “Mazandaran was marvelous,” *nav(i)ə* “was not.”

The locative-existential verb is formed with the preverb *da(r)-* (present) and *dav-* (past); it also functions as the auxiliary in the progressive tenses: *ve sar ve lâk-e dala darâ* “its head is inside its shell,” *dava ləštâ* “he was licking,” *da xəšk vunə* “it is withering,” *də’=mmírənə* “is dying.”

“Become.” This verb is conjugated regularly on the present stem *vu-* or *vi-* and the past stem *v-*. Examples: *vina/vuna* “it becomes,” *xâr na-vu-n-â* “it doesn’t get fixed,” *mašt bavu* “that it become brimful,” *tâ sar val navu, klâ val niâ* “if the head doesn’t warp, the hat isn’t wrapped” (idiom), *xun-əsbe-bava!* (lit. one whose blood has turned white) “you conscienceless!” *agə nâkas te malk-ə sar čer bavə* “if an alien take over your estate.”

The verb *kaf-/kat-* “fall” (< **kaft-*) has a high frequency in Kojuri, acting as the auxiliary in many compound verbs. One interesting usage is its acting, in the third person singular, in lieu of the locative verb for inanimates: *kâtâ/kâtə* “it lies [there], it’s there.” This verb constitutes many nominal compounds (see Verbal nouns, below) as well. One of its derivatives is *katə*, a dish of simmered soft rice popular especially in the Caspian region but also elsewhere in Persia (*kate/kata*). The extended meaning “lax, slack,” has also a reflex in Kojuri *kat*, slack clay used in construction, and (from the present stem) *kəffa* “lain in ruins.”

Verbal nouns. The infinitive is formed on the past stem suffixed by *-an*, e.g., *da-kušt-an* “to extinguish” *por batətan čarm=o jərab osânnâ* “too much running wears down shoes and socks.”

The past participle, formed with the past stem plus modal-aspectual prefix/preverb, is a rich source of adjectives and adjectival phrases; e.g., *bapis* “decayed,” *bajos* “chewed,” *bačâ* “having caught a cold,” *bačos* “sucked,”

davass “tied,” *hələşərəs* (pres. stem *ləşər*) “squeezed,” *bəşkâni* “broken,” *bakkâni* “plucked,” *dafissâni* “soaked,” *dim-badâ* “thrown away,” *natəlvəs* (Pers. *natalabida*) “un-demanded,” *vabâh dakat* (Pers. *vabâ oftâda*) “infected by plague,” *ši-bamərd-ə zənâ* “widowed woman,” *bakušt-ə əspij* “killed louse,” *veher-hakərdə taxta* “holed timber,” *guk-nakərd* “[cow] not given birth to a calf.”

The present stem alone or suffixed by *-â* acts as the present participle; e.g., *tâj* “gallop,” *gur-əškō* “gravedigger,” *lâk-ə-ran* “wooden-pot scraper,” *vâš-anjən* (causative stem) “weed mower,” *lu-zan* “kicker, one who kicks habitually,” *rasadkar* “one who allocates” (possibly carrying the fossilized stem *kar-* “do” that is replaced by *kən-* in Caspian), *naxârâ-ye mâl-â xârâ xârâ* “the wealth of the parsimonious will be pocketed (lit. eaten) by the larcener” (idiomatic expression), *badi osəzan gəl xârâ*, *nadi jonâ xârâ yâ sonâ xârâ* “you saw the pregnant woman eating dirt, you didn’t see if she eats it chewed or ground” (proverb), *go ke lesa daniâ nəmak naxârâ* “when it is not licking time, the cow doesn’t eat salt” (proverb). Note also *mass-ak* (Pers. *časbanda*) “sticking.”

Word formation. New words are derived by adding the suffixes *-i*, *-in*, and *-ən*, as in *seri* “satiation,” *tali* “bitterness,” *jiri* “lowness”; *sarin* “head support,” *nəmâzin* “dusk,” *tilən* “muddy,” *xekən* “obese,” *sâlin* “agile,” *rəškən* “lousy,” *təsən* (Pers. *čosu* “despicable, contemptible, inept”), *zeqən* “flimsy,” *kingən* (Pers. *keštak*) “gusset,” *lexən* “horny mare” (from *lex* “hole”), *kərməjan* (Pers. *kermu*) “wormy,” *kâ-kar-ən* “playground,” *âmsən* “teacher” (i.e., *âməs-ən*, past participle: *bimsəni* “learned”; cf. Mazandarani of Espivard present stem *məs-* and the causative past stem *məsəndi-* “teach, learn”; *âməs-* < inchoative stem **ā-mauk-s-* or **ham-auk-s*, which yields Man. Mid. Pers. *hammōxs-* “be taught,” *hammōz-* “teach”; also Gilaki *amuj* “teach,” Old Ṭabari *mujan* “teacher”; see Borjian, 2009, p. 96).

Glossary. The following is a list of interesting Kojuri words to supplement those cited previously in this article: *ajik* “worm,” *alah* “eagle,” *angis* “finger,” *aš* “bear,” *âsio* “mill,” *âsni* “fairytale,” *assəri* “tear,” *ašun* “last night,” *bâl* “arm,” *bâlfa* “brow,” *bəna* “earth,” *bənj* “rice,” *čâ* “cold,” *čak* “foot,” *čərnəl* “ink” (< Russian *chernila*), *činəkâ* “chicken,” *diâr* “apparent” (Pers. *peydâ*), *dim* “face,” *əsbij* “louse,” *əšnâfa* “sneeze,” *fe(y)k* “willow tree,” *fermāni* “persimmon,” *fia* “shovel,” *gal* “rat,” *gata* “big,” *gərəm* “heel,” *halâ* “yet,” *hâla* “half of the load, one of the pair” (Pers. *lengâ*), *hammas* “viscous, thick” *hasəkâ* “bone,” *jarš* “trash,” *jət* “yoke,” *juri* “up, above,” *kâ* “play, game,” *kâlviâs* “yawn,” *kangəl* “beehive,” *karb* “knee,” *kâtə* “ladder,” *kavaz* “turtle,” *kelen* “ashes,” *kijâ* “girl,”



lānj “lightly cooked rice,” *ling* “leg,” *māhr* “snake,” *makkəl* “dandruff,” *marji* “lentil,” *məjik* “eyelash,” *məjila* “ant,” *mičkā* “sparrow,” *mis* “fist,” *nāk* “chin,” *nəheb* “scold,” *nəmāšter* “evening,” *pehrā* “day after tomorrow,” *qət* “strength,” *rikā* “boy,” *rumiā* “beans,” *səsk* “sour,” *tahm* “team,” *talā* “rooster,” *taš* “fire,” *təl* “lip,” *tim* “egg,” *tisā* “empty,” *tišt* “upright,” *trik* “hail,” *vâjâr* “disgraced” (for Pers. *rosvā*; the word is formally comparable to Pers. *bāzār*, where one’s privacy is at risk), *vak* “frog,” *vaka* “kidney,” *varda* “quail,” *vašni* “hungry,” *vašta* “half-burnt wood” (cf. Pers. *gašta* “turned”), *veher* “hole,” *vəhuma* “excuse,” *vəsâr* “lukewarm,” *vəsni* “co-wife,” *višâr* “awake,” *xâl* “branch,” *xâxar* “sister,” *xəman* “plain, flat land,” *xəš* “kiss,” *yâri* “husband’s brother’s wife” (Tehrani Pers. *jâri*), *zehel* “eclipse,” *zem* “damp,” *zil* “stretched.”

Literature. Like other Caspian districts, Kojur has a rich oral tradition, which is yet to receive proper documentation. A genre of lyric songs and poems that enjoy popularity in Kojur, as in the rest of Mazandaran, is the *amiri*, attributed to the legendary *Amir Pāzvāri* (see Borjian and Borjian; for samples in Kojuri; Jahāngiri, pp. 297-301). Moreover, Kojur is the birthplace of the eminent poet Rezā Ḳarāti, who is believed to have lived in the late *Zand* or early Qajar period; his poems are partly collected (see Şaffāri; Humand, pp. 76-91; Mir-‘Alinaqi). While local literature remained exclusively oral until late in the 20th century, some Kojuri poets have begun publicizing their works, such as *Timjār*, quatrains by Sayyed Ḥasan Ḥosayni Andarud; *Sulārdeni* (62 couplets and a *ġazal* from Nur and Kojur) by Jalil Qeyşari; and *Pārpirār* by Farhud Jalāli Kandelusi. These poems are composed largely along traditional lines in form and meaning, some aspiring to the Ṭabari poems of Nimā Yuşij, but not without innovative meters and ideas, especially nostalgic expression of the lost tranquility of the rural life. Most noteworthy are the poems of Jalāli Kandelusi, who bluntly expresses many current socio-political issues.

Topomastics. The term *rostāq* was used as a suffix for the smallest administrative unit in western Mazandaran, and Kojur is the only district that has preserved the term regularly. Administratively corresponding to *boluk* on the Iranian Plateau, *rostāq* signifies river valleys (cf. Parthian *rdyst’g*, Mid. Pers. *rōstāg* “river-bed; district, province”; MacKenzie, p. 72).

Balada is an appellation for the central district of Kojur (Balada-ye Kojur) and some other mountainous districts of Mazandaran, such as Nur, Lārijān, and Savādkuh. Balada-ye Kojur appears to be an Arabicized form of Şahr-e Kojur, though *şahr* designated an administrative unit rather than a town in earlier times. On the other hand, many Mazandarans perceive the word as *bālā-deh*



“the upper settlement.”

In historical Kojur we find toponyms in *-us*, including Čālus, Kandelus, Lus (lat 36°19' N, long 51°50' E), Zānus, Konus, as well as Kandusān (in Ebn Esfandiār, p. 158). This pattern is extended as far south as *Darrus* in Šemirān, which is now a northern district of Greater Tehran. Idiosyncratic to the central Alborz, the suffix may have survived from a non-Iranian linguistic substratum. The river designated □□□□ on the maps as another name for the Sisang(ān) can be a reflex of Old Iranian *θraya- “three”; although an irregular development, it nevertheless has the Persian parallel *tirist*, a rare form of *sisad* “three hundred.”

The Caspian dialects have a tendency to abridge the originally longer toponyms, as seen in the hydronym Satulkiā Solṭān, shortened for Solṭān ‘Ali Kiā Solṭān, according to Hyacinth Rabino (1913, p. 444). The same argument is held for Sardinkelā to be an abbreviation for the formal Ṣalāḥ-al-Din Kelā, a village at the mouth of the Kojur River (idem, p. 445). But this may very well be a hypercorrection of the authentic local name, which shows three genuine Caspian elements: *sar* (“at”), *din* (a mound formed on top of the relics of old settlements found and named as such all over the Caspian littoral), and *kālā* (typical suffix in Caspian place names), hence Sar-din-kelā “village near the mound.”

For the name “Kojur,” see KOJUR i, above.

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