



KULĀBI DIALECT

KULĀBI DIALECT, a distinct variant of Tajik spoken in [Kulāb](#) and adjoining districts.

The [Tajik](#) dialects spoken in Kulāb are grouped with those of Qarātegin, a district on the middle course of the Vaḵš river, and the [Ḥeṣār](#) valley as Southern Tajik (Rastorgueva, 1960), characterized as having been far less influenced by Uzbek, both in phonology and morphology, than are Northern Tajik dialects. The Kulābi varieties are classified into the following subgroups. (1) Northern Kulābi, spoken in the upper and middle Yāḵsu and Qezelsu, downstream to the confluence of the two rivers; (2) Western Kulābi, dominant on the left bank of the Vaḵš river, from Baljovān in the north to Sangtōda in the south (in Dangāra District); (3) The Kulābi of Ḥeṣār, spoken by the immigrant communities along the rivers Vaḵš (Fayzābād, Nārak [Nurek], and Yāvān), Kāfernehān, and Varzāb; (4) Southern Kulābi, indigenous to the south of Kulāb Province (Atobullov, IV, p. 220; Nemenova, 1956, pp. 66-77). The dialect of Kāvaling, in a remote high valley of the Āb-e Mazār, northeast of Kulāb Province, is well documented by Roza L. Nemenova, and there is a wealth of orally transmitted literature from northern Kulāb, most notably the Guruḡli stories (see [Kōroḡlu](#)), of which several volumes have been published. Salient traits distinguishing Kulābi from standard Tajik (henceforth Taj.) are briefly discussed below. The data are from Nemenova, Atobullov, and the author's documentation in 2007 and 2012.

Phonology. The vocalic system of Kulābi consists of three stable vowels /e o u/, which do not vary in quality even when unstressed, and three unstable vowels



/a i ɪ/, which may vary in quality when unstressed. The vowel /ɪ/ may be described as close back unrounded [u]; it reduces in duration when unstressed. Minimal pairs are *bur* “chalk; white” ≠ *bɪr*– “cut” ≠ *bor* “load”; *ser* “satiated” ≠ *sir* “secret” ≠ *sɪr* “track; roof purlin.”

Diachronically, Kulābi has rounded the original Persian ā to /o/ and still holds on to the front *majhul* ē, as /e/, but, contrary to standard Tajik, Kulābi has absorbed the back *majhul* ō into /u/. Northern and Western Kulābi have raised the prenasal ā to /u/ (e.g., *nun* “bread,” *xuna* “house,” *dumod* “son-in-law”), a very peculiar development for Central Asian (eastern) Persian, although it prevails in the western Iranian Plateau, not only in colloquial Persian of Iran but also in Lori, Mazandarani, and Central Plateau Dialects, among others. The sound /ɪ/ originates chiefly from the Classical Persian u/ū, which also yields Kulābi /u/; examples are *dɪ* “two,” *gɪl*, “flower,” *bɪz* “goat,” *dɪxtar* “daughter,” *kɪrta* “shirt,” *lɪvɪk* “little finger,” *dɪst* “hand,” *xɪsɪr* “husband’s father,” *xɪdɪm* “myself,” *mékɪna* “he does.”

Characteristic consonants are the pharyngeal stop /ʕ/ and fricative /ħ/, occurring mostly in words of Arabic origin, for example, ‘*ayb* “flaw,” ‘*alaf* “fodder,” *ba’d* “after,” *ši’la* “flame,” *da’vo* “claim,” *mi’alim* “teacher”; *hozir* “now,” *ħauli* “house,” *ħikumat* “wisdom,” *soħib* “owner,” and proper names, such as *Raħim*. The pharyngeals also occur, un-etymologically, in a few native words: ‘*asp* “horse,” ‘*imed* “hope”; *ħamsoya* “neighbor,” *ħɪnar* “art.” Interestingly, the pharyngealized form for “horse” occurs far and wide within the Iranian linguistic domain, as ‘*asb* in the Lori of Šuštar (Vaziri, p. 15; cf. [DEZFUL ii. Dezfuli and Šuštari Dialects](#)), K̲vānsāri (Tasbihi, p. 115; see also [K̲ĀNSĀR](#)), and Caucasian Tāt (Authier, p. 235).

Kulābi tends to elide consonants. Initial /h/ shows considerable instability: (*h*)*amra* “companion,” (*h*)*ezum* “firewood,” *amóli* (< *hamin ħālā*) “right now,” *toli* (< *tā ħālā*) “by now,” *memun* “guest”; syllable-final /h/ resurfaces when the word is suffixed, for example, *ni/nihum* “nine/ninth.” In Southern Kulābi /h/ is lost entirely, and the initial /y/ is dropped usually, as in *od* “memory,” *oft* “he found.” Lenition of the original Persian b to /w/ occurs in intervocalic and final positions: *tawar* “axe,” *ziwun* “tongue,” *sew* “apple.” Contraction due to the loss of /d/ and final /n/, /r/, and /s/ is characteristic in Kulābi; examples are *akɪ* (< *aknun*) “now,” *íqa* (< *in-qad(a)r*) “this/so much,” *ita(ri)* (< *in-ṭawr(i)*) “this way, such”), *bézi*, *bez-ay* (< *ba ġayr az*) “other than, except for,” *ka(d)es(t)ay/kistay* (< *karda istoda ast*) “he is doing.” Omitting is allowed as far as it creates no ambiguity.



Adpositions and enclitics. The postposition *-(r)a* (< *-rā*) is multifunctional. (1) It marks the direct object: *gov-it-a firuš* “Sell your cow!” (2) It supplements the prepositions *ba(y)* “with” and *ay* “from” to mark the indirect object: *ami binga ba tiramo-ra soz mekinem* “We’ll fix this very roof in autumn”; *dar-a maḥkam ki, murdem ay xūnki-ra!* “Close the door firmly, we would die from cold!” (3) It is used as attributive passive in lieu of the *ežāfa* marker, an Uzbek Turkic construction: *duxtār-a dast-aš* (lit. “of-girl her-hand”) “the girl’s hand,” *Savzamo-ra šu-š bisyor mardak-i xub bīday* “Sabzamāh’s husband is (known as) a very good man.”

The polysemous *da* (seldom *dar*) “in, at” functions as both preposition and postposition. It may signify direction: *Usto Šarif čuv-a ovar dā zūmin partoft-iš* “Cobbler Šarif brought the stick and threw it on the ground”; place: *mi biyom zan-im xuna-i oča-š-da* “I’ll come [with] my wife to her mother’s house”; orientation: *amu-ra Mošarif-da bite-š* “Give the very same one to Māḥšarif”; duration: *pōrina maylis-a se so’at-da tamom kardem* “Last year we ended the meeting in three hours.” The preposition forms a circumposition with *ay* “from; than” in comparative compounds: *ma ay ti-da kalun* “I (am) senior to you” (note optional omission of the copula). As an adverbial enclitic *-da* implies emotion or emphasis: *bira-da birem!* (= colloquial Pers. *de-boro berim!*) “Come on, let’s get going”; *inja mun-iš-da bišuy-aš* “Just leave it here, she’d wash it.”

Other frequent postpositions are *qatī* “with” (equaling Taj. *kāti*; Perry, p. 91), as in *qati-m jang kardāy* “He has fought along with me”; and the peculiar *-wori* “like, resembling; as if,” analogous to standard Tajik *-barin* (Perry, p. 101): *u ma-wori sinf-i čorum mexona* “Like me, he studies at the fourth grade”; *‘imr-i odam ‘asp-i davand-wori raftā istodās* “Man’s life is passing by like a galloping horse.”

The particles *ku* and *ala* imply enticement or allurement, for example, *ku ma biza!* “Come on, let’s play [it]!”; *hadaha kini ala!* “Come on, hurry up!” As enclitic, *ku* is used to express righteous indignation or desperate hope: *hozir meoyad-ku!* “He had better come soon.” The interrogative enclitic *-mi*, having been borrowed from Uzbek into most Tajik dialects (cf. Perry, p. 294), play little role in Kulābi proper, though the Kulābi immigrants in Ḥešār have adopted it as a common yes-no question marker: *xud-iš marḡelonī-mi?* “Is he a Marḡelāni?”

Personal pronouns. There are two sets of them: freestanding singular *mi/ma*,



ti/tu, u, plural *mo, šmo, uho/uvo*; and enclitic singular *-m, -t, -š*, plural *-mun, -tun, -šun*, with the infix *-t-* when attached to consonants.

Verbs. The double causative, frequently used, is formed by inserting *-orun-* after the present stem of the verb. This peculiar formant can be explained diachronically as a doubling of the causative formant *-on-/un-* (< *-ān-*) and rhotacism of the nasal of the first element: *xand-or-un-d-an* (< **xand-ān-ān-id-an*) “to make laugh,” *xezorundan* “to cause [someone] to stand up,” *aftorundan* “to make fall,” *kučurundan* “to migrate.”

Personal suffixes are singular *-im/-am, -i, -a*, plural *-em, -en, -an*. The third person singular ending is zero in the preterit and *-as/-ay* (< *ast*) in the present perfect; examples: *méra, mérav-a* “He will go,” *raft-ø* “He went,” *raft-áy/ás* “He has gone.” Major prefixes are the imperfective *mī-/me-* and perfective/subjunctive *bi-*, for example, *mimbiren* “You (will) die,” *bimbiren* “that you die.” In Northern and Western Kulābi, both prefixes may coexist to produce a modal shade: *na-me-bi-šin-i?* “Won’t you sit?”; *me-bi-gu-m-šun, mexandan* “Should I tell them, they will laugh.”

Periphrastic forms are analogous to standard Tajik even if contracted forms often conceal the underlying construction. The progressive aspect is constructed using conjugated forms “stand” as an auxiliary and the past participle of the main verb: *raftá istodáy/istodás* “He is going,” *raftá ista^há/istodá bid* “He was going.” The inferential mood, used to report a non-witnessed event without confirming it, is the norm in Northern and Western Kulābi; examples: (imperfective) *méraftay/s* “He is (evidently) going, used to go, will be going”; (pluperfect) *raftá bestam/bidástay* “I/he (evidently) had gone.”

The past participle form in *-gī*, used in the perfect and the conjectural mood in standard Tajik, has rather low frequency in Kulābi. The future participle connotes intention, as in *girim šidim* (= Taj. *giriftanī šudam*) “I wanted to seize/receive [it].”

Syntax. To integrate quotations into the narrator’s speech, the verb “to say” or “to ask” may follow the speech string or may be inserted after an introductory or explanatory phrase. Examples: “*dar-m-a huy bumoni,*” *guft, “agar, metimut xela tanga-vu zar”* (Gūrūglī, 1962, p. 42) “‘Should you open the door to me’,” he said, ‘I’ll give you plenty of money and gold’”; *Bobo Qambar galavon ki did,* “*či meguy,*” *gufta, “dodar?” pursid* (idem, p. 39) “When Bobo Qambar the herder



saw [it], ‘what do you say, brother,’ he asked”; *ay kuza sado omadas*: “*ey kambağal*,” *guftas*, “*šimo iqa diqqat našaven*, ...” “from the jar (supposedly) came out a voice: ‘O poor man,’ it would say, ‘Don’t be so curious!’” (Nemenova, 1956, p. 145).

This type of construction is found also in standard Tajik and is characterized by John Perry as “Turkic-style” (Perry, p. 322). Nevertheless, it is common not only in Kulabi, which shows little Turkic influence in comparison with northern Tajik dialects, but also to the south and east of Kulāb in the neighboring Iranian languages of the Pamirs and Hindu Kush, which have remained in relative isolation for centuries. Examples: Yidgha: *Žiṇkiko xalās šui, nayeṇ xuṛet*. “*Šābaš*,” *žiṇkiki* ¹*štyō*, “*šābaš, wo mən xalās kəṛet [...]*” “The woman got rid of them, and they ate the food. ‘Well done,’ said the woman. ‘Well done. You have rid me of them’” (Morgenstierne, 1938, p. 177, §§112-13). Munji: “*yo ilóyi!*” — *šta*, — “*ma šti fármī?*” = “‘O God,’ he said, ‘what could it be?’” (Gryunberg, p. 103, §8). Sarikoli: *Armýtík mas yot хы, a-rápc-i wád*: “*a, žeḍ rapc*,” — *-i levd*, — “*šič waz a-tá na zonam-o!*” “Armytik came and grabbed the fox: ‘O thief fox,’ he said, ‘this time I won’t kill you’” (Pakhalina, 1966, p. 91, §2).

Lexicon. Kulābi is particularly distinctive in its verb inventory. Many Kulābi verb stems do not have parallels in either standard Tajik or Persian, while some verbs are deceptive. Examples: *bondan* (Taj. *mondan*) “to put; leave”; *bonidan* “to look after, fatten up”; *čalundan* “to mix”; *čangidan* “to scratch”; *čapidan* “to plaster, smear”; *čiptidan* “to slide, slip, glide”; *čokidan* “to smoke”; *dirušidan* “to scrape”; *‘eqidan* “to wither”; *fičidan/fijidan* “to suck, drink”; *fir(u)madan* (Taj. *faromadan, foromadan*) “to come down, get off, decrease”; *firikidan* “to peel off (e.g., a dried blister)”; *firovardan* “to bring down”; *foristan, for-* (Taj. *foridan*) “to like, delight, be agreeable”; *gılıqidan* “to sob”; *jogidan* “to bark, cry”; *kalofondan* “to carry out”; *kalowidan* “to totter, rock”; *kılıxidan* “to cough lightly and continuously”; *kırojidan/kırejidan* “to cluck (the noise that a hen makes)”; *kovondan* “to snare (someone) into disclosing a secret” (Pers. *zir-e zabān-e kas-i-rā kašidan*); *laqidan* “to lap up, take up with the tongue”; *lawidan* “to plaster, coat”; *limbidan* “to collapse; beat up”; *liqidan* (Taj. *laqqidan*) “to skid”; *lišpondan* “to make slip or glide”; *lutidan* “to struggle, flounder about”; *šilambidan* “to collapse, implode”; *šiko(yi)dan, šikoy-* “to open; spread; *šinundan* “to seat”; *vardan, var-* “to bring”; *varmosidan* “to swell, bulge”; *vinjidan* “to (tr.) crumple”; *virejidan* “to (intr.) wrinkle, whither, crumple, buckle”; *vızirimbidan* “to blister, swell”; *xambidan, xambundan* “to



come down, get off or down, dismount”; *xelidan* “to pound; rub”; *zaxidan* “to cough”; *zgaštan*, *zgar-* “to pass.”

Sample text and translation. Excerpt from a Guruḡli performance by Qorbān-‘Ali Rajab, from Sar-e Kāsār in northern Kulāb province (Gūrūḡlī, 1962, p. 367):

*dar in davra, e pir-u barno,
doston kunum, hamat guš bundo.
tu bušnav, e bobo-y pīrum,
sifat-a ay Čambul megirum.
yag pugoy ruz-ay dam-i suhar,
xuršed-i olam bud munavvar.
dar gurdi Čambul, e birodar,
šukuftay se bargaho-i tar.
pansad gul har guruh yagdigar,
dar juyho-y gul hay haštod duxtar.
salomči xambiday peš-i mo,
čīl durman xambidu Ahmad bo,
Avaz ham xambid kokul-tillo,
ru-i taxt šīšt Soqi Bobo.
hama yoro šīštan bar ba bar,
dustarxon davidak dar suhar.
ba’d ay xurdan-i nun-u ham ob,
ba’d ay xurdan-i ham six-kavob,
sulton Soqi-ra kardak nigo...*

In this era, O the young and old,
I relate a story, you listen all.
You listen, O my old grandpa.
I begin my account from [the city of] Čambul.
Early in the morning near dawn,
the sun of the universe was in shine.
Around Čambul, O brother,
has bloomed fresh groundcover.
Five hundred rose[faced] in assortments__
in the flower streams are eighty girls.
The seneschal came down to us;
forty leagues he came together with Ahmad.
Avaz the golden locks came down as well;
sitting on the throne was Sāqi Bābā.



All friends sat side by side;
they spread the tablecloth at dawn.
Having had bread and water too,
having eaten kebab on skewers,
the sultan looked at Sāqi...

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