



## NEŠALJ II. THE DIALECT

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Corresponding to its geography, Nešalj (نیشال) had a Median dialect of Rāji variety, a language group spread throughout Kashan region, but it has been succumbing speedily to Persian in recent decades (see [KASHAN ix. The Median Dialects of Kashan](#)).

*Documentation.* According to the field notes of Ehsan Yarshater in 1969, only the elderly people in Nešalj spoke the vernacular. A few years later Moḥammad-Rezā Majidi could identify in the village eight speakers, all between 60 and 85 years of age (Majidi, p. 35). After four decades, the information lacuna was breached by ‘Abbās Ḥalvāči (2011), who reports that the Rāji dialect of Nešalj has now been replaced by a Persian variety similar to Kashan accent (as documented in the folktales collected by Ḥalvāči, 2014). Nevertheless, Ḥalvāči elicited Rāji vocabulary from a Nešalji speaker who did not speak the idiom on regular basis.

Consequently, Nešalji should be considered an extinct Rāji dialect, having only survived in incomplete records. The available data include a modest amount of field notes by Yarshater in 1969, which is excerpted in his article (1985, pp. 738-39) to demonstrate the role of grammatical gender in the dialects spoken in the province of Kashan; a list of more than ninety words by Majidi (pp. 36-39); and an inexpert glossary by Ḥalvāči (2011). It goes without saying that



our knowledge of Nešalji remains comparatively limited and there is little hope that it will show any improvement in the future. The language loss in Nešalj bears even more significance considering paucity of linguistic data from the entire district of Niāsar.

One may infer a certain degree of disagreement among the documentations; for example, for the gloss “cloud,” we have Majidi *oyir* versus Ḥalvāči *avr*. However, this kind of irregularity is not surprising in view of the absence of standard norms in the vernacular that leads to practical fluidity of articulation, a trait also evident in other dialects of the region. Another source of disagreement among the sources on Nešalji may be attributed to poor documentation; for instance, both Majidi *yenke* and Ḥalvāči *jan* are glossed as the polysemous Persian word *zan*; hence, when compared to the nearby Rāji dialects, the two Nešalji words should correspond to “woman” and “wife” respectively.

*Grammar.* The grammar of Nešalji may only be sketched in outline. The pronominal suffix for the third person singular is *-i*, corresponding to those in *Abyāna’i*, Qohrudi, *Abuzaydābādi*, and *Ārāni*, but contrasting with *-š* in other Kashani dialects (Borjian, 2011, Table 2). Identified freestanding personal pronouns are sg. 1st *ma(n)*, pl. 1st *hamā/homā*, 2nd *šamā*, 3rd *ašon*. Demonstratives are Yarshater *nuhun*, Majidi *nohon*, Ḥalvāči *nahu* “this,” Yarshater *nemun* “that,” *nemuniun* “these,” *nemiun* “those.”

As a rule in Central Plateau languages, Nešalji employs a form of split ergativity that assigns the role of the agent to the pronominal suffixes in the past tenses of the transitive verbs, as shown in the sentences of [Figure 1](#).

Nešalji is one of the few Rāji dialects that possess grammatical gender (Borjian, 2011, Table 4). Yarshater marks several morpho-syntactic categories for gender in Nešalji. The feminine marker for nouns is an unstressed *-a*, (e.g., *kārga* “hen”), sometimes applied optionally, as in *bóz(a)* “goat.” Gender is differentiated by the indefinite marker: *i quč* “a ram,” versus *ya boza* “a goat.” In verbs, gender distinction is found in the third person singular of the copula and verb endings (e.g., *pür-am nāsāz=e* “my son is ill” vs. *dot-am nāsāz=a* “my daughter is ill”). [Table 1](#) demonstrates the effect of gender in the conjugation of the past tenses for the verb “go.”

*Linguistic position.* In broad comparative-historical terms, the phonological features defining Northwest Iranian are well presented in Nešalji;



representative words are *zumā* “son-in-law” (for the sound output  $z < \text{OIr. } *dz < \text{IE } *g^{(h)}$ ), *esbe* “dog” ( $sb < \text{OIr. } *tsw < \text{IE } *k^{w}$ ), *ār* “mill” ( $r < \text{OIr. } *θr$ ), *eštā* “standing (retention of  $*št$ )”, *bar* “door,” *bey* “other” ( $b < \text{OIr. } *dw$ ), *yavon* “young” ( $y < \text{OIr. } *y$ ), *jan* “woman” ( $j < \text{OIr. } *j < \text{IE } *g^{(h)}$ ), *ruj* “day” ( $j < \text{OIr. } *č < \text{IE } *k^{(u)}$ ). Another Northwest attribute of Nešalji may be found in the component *paš* “after, behind” in *pašeharā* (alternatively, *pehrā*) “day after tomorrow” and *pašeru* (for Pers. *kušāčini*) “collecting after harvest,” which verify the sound change  $*sč > š$  in the isoglottic word Av. *pas-ca* vs. OPers. *pasā* (see Paul).

In a narrower sense, we may pursue the position of Nešalji within the Rāji linguistic domain in light of the data that have come into view since the latest attempt to define the Rāji language group (Borjian, 2011). That study incorporates 14 isoglosses (partially listed in Borjian, 2011, Table 5), shown in Table 2 below for Nešalji. Taking into account the lack of data for the items 4, 5, 6 and 8, there remains ten isoglosses, out of which Nešalji shows nine agreements, thereby scoring 90 percent in isoglottic agreement, which places Nešalji within the core area of the Rāji dialect group, together with Abyāna’i, Qohrudi, Abuzaydābādi, Jowšaqāni, Farizandi, and Yārāndi (see Borjian, 2011, Table 6 and Fig. 1).

*Vocabulary.* Lexical similarity among the Rāji dialects has not been studied any more extensively than for the glosses shown in Table 2. One may expand the list of isoglosses to include Nešalji *āle* “half, one side” and *pak* “stair” as common words in Kashani linguistic domain. On the other hand, a peculiar Nešalji word not documented for any other Central Plateau dialect is *ašma* “moon,” with similar forms in Tāleši, Tati of Harzan and Keringān, and Zaza, as well as Mid. Pers. *āyišm* (Ḥasandust, I, pp. 53-54).

Below is a thematic glossary of Nešalji:

Kinship. *mā* “mother,” *pat* “father,” *dot* “daughter,” *pür* “son,” *xāka*, *dādā* “sister,” *yāda* “wife of husband’s brother.”

Human body. *dum* “face,” *gorm* “neck,” *tete* “breast,” *borome* “cry,” *ošnoša* “sneeze,” *daryābe* “yawn.”

Material culture. *ke* “room,” *sarangeyz* “house overlooking another house,” *sul* “gutter,” *kalk* “brazier,” *hut* “cistern,” *yāru* “broom,” *qazqu* “pot,” *čabta* “bat in the game of tipcat” (*alak-dolak*), *dargar* “carpenter.”



Rural life. *bāla* “spade,” *esbār* “spade,” *dār-jan* “axe,” *yassa* “saw,” *čun* “threshing machine,” *sare* “cup used as a water clock in irrigation” (see [CLOCKS](#)), *āriun* “miller,” *raz* “vineyard,” *selx* “water pool,” *vār* “dam, movable obstruction on a channel,” *kargedu* “chicken cote,” *kanda* (Pers. *zāgā*) “winter cote for sheep,” *nahuni* “secret storage inside the room walls for serials.”

Edibles. *qalbusa* “melon,” *zoy* (Pers. *qarāqurut*) “dried black curds,” *luriā* “beans,” *laxm* “boneless meat.”

Flora. *bone* “tree,” *nežga* “lentil,” *qumč* (Pers. *zālzālak*) “hawthorn,” *xasil* “unripe barley.”

Fauna. *vež* “wasp” or “bee,” *maša* “fly,” *xonj* (an insect), *qalbeja* “lizard,” *lodor* “rat,” *olu* “eagle,” *kāre* “spider web,” *kotre* “poppy,” *lua* “fox,” *māljejn* “cat,” *mālija* “sparrow,” *male* “ox” (*marz* “copulation”), *xā* “egg.”

Nature. *varang* “thunder and lightning,” *šamāl* “breeze,” *xāx* “soil,” *yamesun* “winter.”

Adjectives and adverbs. *bez* “ugly,” *nač* “good,” *rute* “naked,” *rud* “dear,” *dorujan* “lie teller,” *sur* “red,” *farā* “wide,” *tāja* “fresh,” *malun* “lukewarm,” *mašqul-zemma* “indebted,” *yadā* “separate,” *jer* “under,” *heza* “yesterday,” *heyā* “tomorrow,” *haney* “yet.”

Miscellaneous. *āqundan* “to squeeze in,” *handātemu* “to converse,” *šulāt* “imploding, cave in of a well,” *yuš* “boil; pimple,” *xošvā* (for Pers. *ta’ārof*) “etiquette,” *hol* “hole,” *yā* “place,” *dežmun* “insult,” *kāe* “game, play,” *ašura* “*ta’zia*, Shi’i passion play,” *teq* (lit. blade, ray) “*Āšurā*, the 10th day of Moḥarram.”

*Language shift.* In spite of a wholesome language shift, some survivals can be identified in the current Persian idiom of Nešalj. An example of semantic shift is *espe*, which is current only as a word of insult, without clearly conveying its original meaning “dog” in the Rāji language. An example of calquing is found in the name of the quarter that is now designated on the maps as *Kuče pon* (*pā’in*) “the lower lane/quarter”; this must be a word-for-word translation of the original *Ver-e jer* (cited by Ḥalvāči, 2014, Introd.), which carried the meaning “the lower side/edge.”



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