



# TAJIK III. COLLOQUIAL TAJIKI IN COMPARISON WITH PERSIAN OF IRAN

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## TAJIK

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The dialects and colloquialisms that are used throughout Persian-speaking regions are diverse. Literary Persian differs from that spoken in modern Iran, which likewise differs from colloquial Tajiki and the form of Persian spoken in Afghanistan (Dari). *Fārsi* of Iran (here called “Farsi” for short), Tajiki, and Dari are distinct branches of the Persian language, and within each branch a wide variety of local dialects exist.

*Dialect differences and distribution in Tajikistan.* There are many dialects of the Tajiki language; individual villages, districts, and regions may have distinctive vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical patterns. However, in broad terms there are three dialects spoken in Tajikistan. (1) The Northern Dialect is spoken in the northern region of Tajikistan, from the Šahrestān pass to [Khujand](#) and its surrounding areas, and is also found in some parts of the [Kurgan Tepe](#) and Šahretus districts. (2) The Central Dialect is spoken in the Zarafšān and Heṣār valleys, including Varzāb and Rāmet, the Rudaki district, and the Sorḳāndaryā province of Uzbekistan. The dialect spoken in the



Zarafšān valley is close to the Northern Dialect, while that of the Ҳеҷār valley resembles the Southern Dialect. The Central Dialect is similar to Standard Tajiki. (3) The Southern Dialect is prevalent in some regions of Dushanbe district, the Waḥdat (Vahdat) and Fayzābād districts, the Rašt valley, Kulāb (see kulāb ii. The Dialects), some areas of Kurgan Tepe, and the regions of Vanj and Darvāz. This dialect can also be heard in parts of Afghanistan along the border with Tajikistan.

For comparative examples of sentences, see Table 2 below.

*Phonology.* Consonants. In Tajiki, the velar stop *q* and the velar/uvular fricatives remain distinct; they have not collapsed into a single phoneme as in Farsi of Tehran. In some dialects, *b* may sound as bilabial *v* or *w*, e.g. *ov*, *ow* “water”; *savz*, *sawz* “green” (cf. Farsi *āb*, *sabz*).\*

Vowels. While the consonants of spoken Tajik and Farsi largely correspond, there are systematic distinctions between the vowels. Thus, among the classical Persian long vowels, *i* may correspond either to the same sound (Farsi and Taj. *in* “this,” *kamir* “dough”) or to a lower Tajiki vowel *e* as in *mekunam* “I make,” *daler* “brave” (cf. Farsi *mikonam*, *delir*); *u* may surface either as the same sound (Taj. *kun* “blood,” *ma’qul* “suitable”) or, depending on the word’s etymology or the phonetic environment, as a lower vowel written in Tajiki with a macron (Taj. *kūtoh* “short,” *mavzū* “topic”); Farsi *ā* corresponds to a more rounded vowel in Tajiki, similar to the vowel in English *bawd* (Taj. *ob* “water,” *hikoya* “story”). In many Tajiki dialects the distinction of length in the “long” vowels *i* and *u* (as in Farsi and Taj. *did* “he saw,” *tut* “mulberry”) and the parallel “short” vowels is neutralized (Taj. *ki* “that” [cf. Farsi *ke*], and Taj. *šud* “it became” [Farsi *šod*]); this feature has been incorporated in the literary language. The *eżāfa* syllable in Tajiki is pronounced as *-i* (*kitob-i ū* “his book”). Word-final *-a* is not generally raised, cf. Farsi *kāne*, Taj. *kona* “house” (but note Taj. *Dušanbe*).

Diphthongs. In Tajiki the diphthongs *ay* and *aw* are preserved; cf. Farsi *heyf* or *hêf* “alas” (rhymes with English *safe*), Taj. *hayf* (rhymes with Eng. *wife*; cf., however, Taj. *kele*, Farsi *keyli* “much, very”); Farsi *četowr* or *četôr* “how” (rhymes with Eng. *core*), Taj. *čitawr* (rhymes with Eng. *sour*). The latter diphthong is always spelled *av* in Tajiki.

*Morphology and syntax.* Salient peculiarities of colloquial Tajiki under this heading involve pronouns, prepositions and postpositions, and the verb



system. Colloquial pronunciation often involves contractions of the written forms, not always corresponding to those present in Farsi; they will be noted in parentheses. Of frequent occurrence are the spoken reflexes of the particle *-ro* (Farsi *-rā*): *-(r)a*, as in *tu-ra didam* “I saw you,” *man-a did* “he saw me.”

Pronouns. As well as *ū* (cf. Farsi *u*), a third person pronoun *vay* “he, she” is more frequently used in colloquial Tajiki. *Vay* is also used as a demonstrative adjective equivalent to *on* (Farsi *ān* “that”). In referring politely to a third party in his or her presence, the phrases *on kas* or *vay kas* “that person” are used. Tajiki *Onho*, *vayho* (*ono*, *vayo*), or (less common than Farsi *išān*) Tajiki *ešon* can be used for the third person plural. The second person is *tu*, plural *šumo*; as in Farsi, the latter is also used for singular reference in formal or polite speech, so one of the explicit plural forms *šumoho* (cf. Farsi *šomāhā*), *šumoyon*, *šumohon* is used for actual plural reference. The first person plural, *mo* (Pers. *mā*), may also be used in singular reference (equivalent to *man* “I”), and explicit plural forms for this are *moho*, *moyon*, *mohon* “we.”

Prepositions. Basic prepositions, singly and in combination, are shared by Tajiki and Farsi. However, they may be combined differently: *kitob-aš-a ba rūy-i miz guzošt* (cf. Farsi *ketāb-eš-o ru-ye miz gozāšt*) “she put her book on[to] the table” (See further Baizoev and Hayward, pp. 55-62). *Be* “without” and *bar* “upon” may be used as independent prepositions, unlike their counterparts *bi* and *bar* in Farsi, which appear only in lexical combinations (Tajiki *be vay* “without him”; cf. Farsi *bedun-e u*). *Dar* (*da*) “in” is also used more generally as a locative: *dar har jo* “everywhere,” *dar sar toqi došt*, *va dar po kafš* “he had a hat on his head, and shoes on his feet.” An adposition peculiar to Tajiki is *qati/kati* “with” (in all senses): *qati mo* “with us” (Farsi *hamrāh-e mā*, also available in Taj.), *kati kord* “with a knife.”

Postpositions. In Northern dialects of Tajiki the prepositions *ba* “to, at,” *dar/da*, and *qati/kati* can alternatively be used as postpositions, appearing *after* the noun phrase they govern (see analysis of Uzbek influences below): *uka-t kujo-ba?* “where’s your younger brother (at)?” *qayči kati* “with scissors.” There are a number of adverbs and prepositions that normally appear as postpositions, e.g. *šir barin safed* “as white as milk” (*barin* “equal to, like, as if”), *onho az avtobus furomadan hamono* “as soon as they got off the bus...” (they... getting-off simultaneous), *mo ba Dušanbe rasidan zamon* “when we reached Dushanbe...” (we... arriving time). This combination of infinitive phrase and postposition is more readily expressed in Farsi or in English by a conjunction followed by a subordinate clause with a finite verb (cf. “Adjectival use of



participles” below).

Verb system. Colloquial Tajiki and Farsi differ in the use of forms of the present and past progressive, participles, the subjunctive, infinitive, and compound verbs. Whereas in Farsi the progressive aspect is constructed using conjugated forms of *dāštan* “to have” as an auxiliary and of the main verb, in Tajiki a conjunct verb is constructed using a non-finite form of the main verb plus conjugated forms of *istodan* “to stop, stand, stay.” In speech, these forms are frequently contracted (e.g., *man rafta istam*; see [Table 1](#)).

In Tajiki the past participle, in addition to the usual Persian form *karda*, may also take a second form by addition to the past stem of the suffix *-gī*. (This suffix is formally identical to that which in Persian forms quality nouns from adjectives, such as *zendagi* “life,” *kastagi* “tiredness”; but the context and function in Tajiki are quite different.) Evidently influenced by Uzbek usage, in Tajiki the suffix *-gī* is used to create participles with a range of verbal and adjectival uses:

Present perfect. As in Farsi, this tense appends the enclitic form of the auxiliary verb “to be” to the past participle, e.g., *man ba Kūlob raftagi-am*, cf. Farsi *man be Kulāb rafte-am* “I have gone/been to Kulab.” With the auxiliary in the subjunctive, unmet obligation in the past is expressed: *boyad raftagi bošam* “I should have gone” (cf. Farsi *bāyad/bāyest miraftam*). The simple *karda-* form of the perfect commonly implies hearsay, inference, or speculation as the source of the statement: *vay sayohat-ba rafta-ast* “he went/has gone on a trip (—I guess/am told)” (see [TAJIK ii. Tajik Persian](#), under Non-Witnessed; Perry, §3.21).

Past perfect. In Tajiki the conjugated auxiliary may be omitted, e.g., *man ba Kūlob raftagi (budam)*, *ki barodaram az Rusiya omad*, cf. Farsi *man be Kulāb rafte budam*, *(vaqti-)ke barādar-am az Rusiye āmad* “I had gone to Kulāb when my brother came from Russia.”

Conjectural tenses. The *kardagi* form of the past participle is used to form tenses of a conjectural mode, which suffice where in Farsi an overt auxiliary or adverb (*bāyad*, *šāyad*) with the subjunctive would be required, e.g. *vayo muzey-ba raftagi-mi?—raftagistand* “Have they been to the museum?—They might have been (but I’m not sure)” (cf. Farsi *ānhā muze rafte-and?—šāyad rafte bāšand*). With the durative prefix *me-*, the same participle has future reference (conjectural or speculative): *ki meraftagist?—man meraftagistam*



“who will go?—probably/maybe I’ll go” (cf. Farsi *ki miravad (mire)?—šāyad man bera[va]m*).

Adjectival uses of participles. By analogy with Uzbek usage, Tajik *-gī* participles may be used as modifiers in a Persian-type *eżāfa* construction to express what in Farsi or English would usually be constructed as a relative clause: *on kino-i dina didagi-am kele ma’ruf ast* “that movie I saw yesterday is very well known” (that film yesterday seen-of-me...), cf. Farsi *ān film-i ke diruz didam keyli ma’ruf ast*. Such “relative phrases” may be tensed by using the composite present progressive participle (cf. Table 1), or the future participle (with the durative prefix *me-*; cf. Conjectural tenses, above), thus: *odami kitob konda-istodagī* “the man (who is/was) reading a book,” *kitob-i mekondagi-am-ro kati kud giriftam* “I took along the book I was to/wanted to/had to read.”

*Linguistic influences.* Uzbek. As a result of the historical coexistence of Tajiks and Uzbeks, there has been marked convergence of the two languages. The influence of Uzbek is evident in all Tajiki dialects, but is stronger in areas with larger Uzbek populations and in areas which were formerly inhabited by Uzbek or other Turkic tribes that gradually adopted Persian in recent centuries. Turkic syntax is characterized by a word order that is frequently the mirror image of Persian. One such legacy from Uzbek is the use in Tajiki of postpositions, as mentioned above. Another is the common use of the Turkic interrogative enclitic *-mi* at the end of the question (where Persian typically places a marker, *āyā*, before it): *tayyor šud-mi?* “is it ready?” Table 2 illustrates parallel uses of past participle forms in Tajiki dialects and spoken Uzbek, and incidentally several other features of syntactic convergence in the two languages.

Note the use of the past participle *kardagī* in the Northern and Southern dialect forms, instead of the present perfect (*karda-am*) as used in Standard Tajiki. In Uzbek the past participle is not conjugated, as seen in example (1). Because of the influence of this Uzbek grammatical pattern, in colloquial Tajiki *-gī* is appended to the base participle of a verb to create a supplementary past participle which can then be used independently, or conjugated with the enclitic auxiliary “to be” (*man kardagi-am*, etc.) to form new tenses and modes. Examples (2) and (3) demonstrate the corresponding placement of negatives in colloquial Tajiki and Uzbek. In Standard Tajiki, the negative marker appears before the verb (*naraftam*). In Uzbek, however, the negative appears *after* the main verb (e.g., *borgan-im yoq*, lit. “my-going [is] not”). Both Northern and Southern Tajiki dialects reflect the Uzbek structure, placing negative particles



after the verb (*raftagem ne*, or *raftagī nestum*), which does not occur in standard or literary Persian. Northern Tajiki usage additionally copies the pronominal suffix on the participle (*didagi-š*, Uzb. *kūrgan-i* “his seeing”).

Russian. During the Soviet period—when Persian of Central Asia was first called *tojikī* (in Persian)/*tadzhikskii ŷazyk* (in Russian)—Russian was the official language of the Tajik Republic. During this time many words and terms came into use that were direct loanwords, word-for-word translations of Russian expressions (calques), or Tajiki terms affected by Russian pronunciation or structure. In large cities, Tajiks educated in Russian schools became primarily Russian speakers, with basic knowledge of Tajiki. In these cities, the frequent use of Russian loanwords in Tajiki speech is common. For example, *aznavtaškilkunī* (derived from the compound verb *az nav taškil kardan* “to form anew”) is a Tajiki term coined from the Russian *reorganizatsiya* (a borrowing from French, later replaced in Russian by the loan-translation *perestroika*). The Tajiki term for “agriculture” is *kojagii qišloq*, derived from the Russian *sel'skoe khozyaĭstvo* (lit. “rural husbandry”). The Tajiki word *beġatarī* “security” (*be* “without” + *ġatar* “danger” + quality noun suffix *-ī*) is a loan translation through the Russian *bezopasnost'* (ultimately from French *sécurité*). Many other terms following similar patterns have been incorporated into Tajiki. (See also Tajik ii. Language, under Sentence syntax; The lexicon; Foreign vocabulary lexical distribution).

Other languages. In addition to dialects of Tajiki and Uzbek, languages such as Kyrgyz, Pamir dialects and Yaghnobi are spoken in Tajikistan. The use of pidgin combinations of Tajiki, Russian, and a third language is common throughout Tajikistan.

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