



# TURKIC LANGUAGES OF PERSIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Only in few other regions (Caucasus and Southern Siberia) one can find a nearly comparable diversity of Turkic languages as in Persia. The number of their speakers varies from several thousands (e. g., *Khalaj*, which had only some ten thousands of speakers in the middle of 1990s; cf. Doerfer, 1997, p. 52) to several millions (e. g., Azarbaijani). Altogether, one-sixth of today's Iranian population is turcophone or bilingual (Persian and Turkic; see Doerfer, 1969, p. 13). The languages they speak belong to different branches of the Turkic language family; most of them (besides such important exceptions as *Khalaj*) are from the Oghuz branch of Turkic languages. The state of our knowledge of these languages and their dialects is very different. Some of them, like Azarbaijani and *Khalaj*, have been widely and intensively investigated, while some other—like *Berberi* in northeastern Iran, which may not even be a Turkic language (Doerfer, 1969, pp. 15-16)—are only the subject of rumors. Hereinafter, the languages and dialects are grouped according to the different branches of the Turkic language family.

### 1. Oghuz.

#### 1.1. Central-Oghuz.

##### 1.1.1. Azarbaijani (to be more specific, Southern Azarbaijani dialects). The



Azərbaycani dilinin İranın şimal-qərbində yayıldığı və ölkənin şimal-qərbindəki "mərkəz" olan Tabrizdə danışıldığı və bir neçə milyon insan tərəfindən danışıldığı qeyd olunur. İran dilində Azərbaycan dilinə nisqətən daha az tədqiqat aparılmışdır. 1970-ci ildə 1.442 əsər Azərbaycan dilinə dair yazılmışdır, lakin yalnız 18 əsər Azərbaycan dilinin İran dilində tədqiqatına dair yazılmışdır (Doerfer, 1983, p. 99, n. 2). Lakin, digər Türkc dilində İran dilində, Azərbaycan dilinə nisqətən daha çox diqqət verilmişdir. Nəşr edilmiş əsərlər lüğət, morfolojiya, sintaks, e.t.d., lakin əsasən Tabrizdən gələn mənbələrə diqqət ayırılır, çünki bu mənbələr əlçatılmaqda idi. İran-Azərbaycani dil tədqiqatının qurucusu Karl Foy (1856-1907), bu mövzuda ilk geniş əsərini 20-ci əsrin əvvəlində yazmışdır (Foy, 1903-04). Daha sonrakı dövrdə H. S. Szapszał (1873-1961), Hellmut Ritter (1892-1971), Vincent Monteil, və Xavier de Planhol qeyd olunmalıdır (Szapszał, 1935; Ritter, 1921 və 1939; Monteil, 1956; Planhol, 1961). Əlavə olaraq, Azərbaycan dilinə dair əsərlər SSRİ (daha sonra müstəqil Rusiya və Azərbaycan) kimi ölkələrdə də nəşr edilmişdir (Hüsejnov, 1958; Rəhimov, 1965; Rüstəmov, 1965; Şirəlijev, 1962; İdem, 1965). İran-Azərbaycani dil mənbələri təqdim edilən ən geniş əsər "Householder and Lotfi's *Basic Course in Azerbaijani*" kitabıdır, bu kitab 1965-ci ildə nəşr edilmişdir.

1.1.2. Galügāh dialekti (Cənubi Qafqazın şərq hissəsi), bu dialekt bəzən "Azərbaycan dilində ən şərqdəki məşhur nöqtə" (Doerfer, Hesche, və Ravanyar, p. vii; cf. Doerfer, 1974, p. 199). Galügāh dialekti Mərkəzi-Oğuz qrupuna aiddir və Azərbaycan dilindəki digər dialektlərlə çox yaxındır. Digər tərəfdən, bu dialekt digər dialektlərdən fərqlənən xüsusiyyətlərə malikdir (Doerfer, Hesche, və Ravanyar, p. vii). Bu dialektin detallı tədqiqatı 1973-cü ildə Gerhard Doerfer tərəfindən başlanmışdır.

1.1.3. Salçuk. Salçuk dialekti ilk dəfə Karl Heinrich Menges (1908-99) tərəfindən qeyd edilmişdir, o, bu dialektin cənub və cənub-qərbdə Kermān ətrafında danışıldığını bildirmişdir (Menges, 1951, p. 279). Daha detallı məlumat Menges tərəfindən təqdim edilməmişdir, çünki o, bu əraziyə girməyə və bu dialekti tədqiq etmək üçün imkan almamışdır (Doerfer, 1970, p. 219).

## 1.2. Northern-Oghuz

1.2.1. Kōrāsāni (Khorasani Turkish). Khorasani Turkish is spoken by more than one million people in the northeast of Persia (in the province of



Khorasan) and in the neighboring regions of Turkmenistan up to beyond the Amu Darya River (Doerfer and Hesse, 1993, pp. 7, 14). Between both regions are located the language and settlement areas of the Turkmens (Sarıq- and Arsari-Turkmens). [Wladimir Ivanow](#) (1886-1970) had recognized already in 1926 that the Khorasani Turkish has to be seen as an idiom different from both the Azarbaijani and the Turkmen languages (Ivanow, p. 154), but its independence was identified later. In 1936 Aleksandr Potseluevskii (1894-1948) regarded it as an independent branch of the Turkmen language (cf. Doerfer, 1977, pp 129-30). Earlier, [Alexander Chodzko](#) (1804-1891) had interpreted Khorasani Turkish as the Turkmen language (Chodzko, 1842, pp. 479-80), while Karl Heinrich Menges first described it as “Turkmen” (Menges, 1939, pp. 9-34) and later as “Azarbaijani” (dialect of Qučān; see Menges, 1951, pp. 275-76). The last assumption was not quite wrong. Indeed, Khorasani Turkish (that is, Northeastern Oghuz) represents a transitional form from Central Oghuz (Azarbaijani) to Northwestern Oghuz (Turkmen), but it is closer to Azarbaijani than to Turkmen. Khorasani Turkish can be divided—depending on the respective definition—into two (Northern and Southern) or four (Northwestern, Northeastern, Central, and Southern) dialects (Doerfer and Hesse, 1993, p. 16). A more detailed knowledge of the Khorasani Turkish was gained in the course of the Turcological expeditions to Persia undertaken by the Department of Turcology and Altaic Studies of the University of Göttingen. These endeavors have led to numerous publications by Doerfer and Hesse about the Khorasani Turkish (Doerfer, 1972, 1977, 1987, 1992, and 1998; Doerfer and Hesse, 1993 and 1998).

### 1.3. Northwestern Oghuz

1.3.1. Turkmen. The Turkmen language of Persia is spoken in the northeast of the country (in the province of Khorasan); its area is adjacent to that of the Khorasani Turkish, and the language areas partly overlap each other. Spoken by approximately 400,000 people, the Turkmen language has the second largest number of speakers after the Azarbaijani among all Turkic languages of Persia. Doerfer’s presumption (1978, p. 133) that “the Turkmen language is not (and if it is, then sporadically) spoken in the entire Khorasan (except in Astarābād)” was not quite correct, since both languages (Persian and Turkmen) exist here side by side. The Turkmen language of Persia is divided in several dialects, which do not differ much from each other but still possess their specific characteristics. Contrary to the Turkmen language of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen language of Persia is less studied, being neither



dealt with nor mentioned in numerous descriptions of the Turkmen language (e.g., Bazin, 1959; Benzing, 1939). Menges mentioned the Turkmens of Persia, but he gave no description of their language (Menges, 1951, p. 278). The first extensive account was presented in 1966 by Yusuf Azmun (Azmun, 1966). Later, Gerhard Doerfer and Wolfram Hesché followed Azmun's description (Doerfer and Hesché, 1998). Among the Oghuz languages, Turkmen shows the most archaic features, such as the preservation of the length of vowels. The above-mentioned Khorasani Turkish has to be distinguished from the Turkmen language and must not be considered a branch of Turkmen.

#### 1.4. Southern-Oghuz.

1.4.1. Afšār. The Afšār language was once spoken in a wide area in western and southwestern Persia from Kermānšāh to the shores of the Persian Gulf. In Europe, the Afšārs became known due to the Afsharid dynasty (see [AFSHARIDS](#)) that ruled in Persia in 1736-96 (about the Southern-Oghuz languages see Doerfer and Hesché, 1989; for Afšār-u-Tēpa, which is the Afšār language of the village of Tēpa, see Ligeti, 1957; for Kābul-Afšār see Abbasov, 1975; Doerfer, 1983 and 1985; and Doerfer and Hesché, 1989). The Afšār language, and especially its variety of Kabul, shows some interesting features, like the “archaic” *h*- (Doerfer, 1985, pp. 168-74).

1.4.2. and 1.4.3. Qašqā'i and Äynallu. These are spoken in the region of Hamadan and in the province of Fars, especially to the north of Shiraz. The relationship between Qašqā'i and Äynallu is still controversial. Tadeusz Kowalski (1889-1948), Annemarie von Gabain (1901-93), and Gerhard Doerfer defined them as dialects close to Azarbaijani (Kowalski, p. 4; von Gabain, p. 174; Doerfer, 1969, p. 14), while Karl Heinrich Menges considered them to be closer to the Ottoman Turkish than to the Azarbaijani and assumed that they formed the third group of dialects of Southwestern Turkish (Menges, 1951, p. 278). Ahmet Caferoğlu (1899-1975) and Gerhard Doerfer, referring especially to the deviations from Azarbaijani, refused Menges' assumption about the closeness of Qašqā'i and Äynallu to the Ottoman Turkish (Caferoğlu and Doerfer, p. 281). Menges regarded Äynallu only as a sub-dialect of Qašqā'i (cf. Caferoğlu and Doerfer, p. 281). From his point of view, Äynallu—as well as Sonqori (see 1.4.4. below)—represents a transitional form between the Azarbaijani and the Khorasani Turkish (Menges, 1951, pp. 273-79; cf. Doerfer, 1977, p. 54). Doerfer regarded the dialects to the north of “Khalajestan” (see [KHALAJ](#), and no. 2. lower in this study), Pugerd, and Äštiān to be close to Qašqā'i and Äynallu. According to him, both Qašqā'i and Äynallu show



closeness to the dialects of Qazvin, north of Tehran, Solaymānābād, and south of Hamadan (Doerfer, 1998, p. 274). Qašqā'i and Äynallu reveal numerous characteristics which allow to relate them to the Southern-Oghuz group (Doerfer and Hesche, 1989, the list between maps 5.5 and 5.6).

Until the middle of the 20th century, Qašqā'i and Äynallu had not been investigated. Aleksandr Romaskevich (1885-1942) and Sir Aurel Stein (1862-1943) were the first who collected materials on these dialects. Their materials were later published in the work of Tadeusz Kowalski (1936), which was the most detailed description of Qašqā'i and Äynallu for that time. Later, researchers like Oliver Garrod, Karl Heinrich Menges, and Marie Thèrèse Ullens de Schooten collected materials but never published them. The materials collected by Menges (recorded in Samirom) were very different from those compiled by Tadeusz Kowalski (cf. Caferoğlu and Doerfer, p. 286). Later studies on the Southwestern dialects of Turkish (von Gabain) dealt with Qašqā'i only marginally. Further materials were collected by Wolfram Hesche, Hartwig Scheinhardt, and Semih Tezcan in Firuzābād during the Turcological expeditions to Persia in 1968, 1969, and 1973. Qašqā'i materials were finally published in 1990 in the volume entitled *Oghusica aus Iran* (Doerfer, Hesche, and Ravanyar); they also include three texts from the collection of K. H. Menges. Since early 21st century, Éva Á. Csató has been specially working on the Qašqā'i language (Csató, 2001 and 2005).

1.4.4. Songqori. Next to Qašqā'i and Äynallu, Songqori is worth mentioning as another dialect of the Southern-Oghuz group. It is spoken in Songqor (Sunqur), east of Kermānšāh (Doerfer, 1977). Songqor (ca. 35,000 inhabitants) is located in a large valley separated from the rest of Kurdistan. There are two villages (Qal'a-ye Farhād Khan, 2 km north of Songqor, 200 inhabitants; and Qorva, 5 km southwest of Songqor, 400 inhabitants) in its neighborhood, in which the spoken dialects differ from the Songqori insignificantly. In the case of Songqori, we had had a scanty knowledge before the Turcological expeditions undertaken by the Department of Turcology and Altaic Studies of the University of Göttingen. Songqori was investigated in the course of the third expedition of 1973 (Doerfer, 1981, p. 70). K. H. Menges had already characterized it—together with the Qašqā'i and Äynallu—as a transitional form from the Azarbaijani to the Khorasani Turkish (cf. Doerfer, 1977, p. 54).

## 2. Khalaj

The Khalaj language area, located approximately 250 km southwest of Tehran,



comprised 47 villages in the 1960s and 1970s. The number of speakers in that time was not more than 20,000. In the middle of 1990s, G. Doerfer assumed a wide Persianization of this group, and such process had already been recognized three decades earlier (Doerfer, 1997, p. 52).

The first information concerning the Khalaj language was given by [Vladimir Minorsky](#) (1877-1966), who published some “Khalaj” texts, but only one of them was really a sample of Khalaj (Minorsky, 1940-42). In addition, Minorsky did not recognize that Khalaj is an independent Turkic language or, to be more specific, a language group. Following Minorsky, Moḥammad Moqaddam (1950) provided some further data about the Khalaj language. After that, Khalaj was not treated until its “rediscovery” by G. Doerfer in the course of the expeditions to Persia in 1968, 1969, and 1973. As a result of extensive research, a grammar (Doerfer, 1988) and a dictionary (Doerfer and Tezcan, 1980) have been worked out for Khalaj.

Another result of the Turcological expeditions initiated by G. Doerfer was the conclusion that Khalaj, which is divided into several dialects, forms an independent group of languages within the Turkic language family. Even though the dialectal differences are not considerable, altogether they show remarkable and wide diversion. Furthermore, this language shows numerous archaisms that can be found either in Old Turkic, or in more distant Turkic languages, such as Yakut or Chuvash (cf. Doerfer, 1989, p. 108-12).

In addition, there are some other idioms about which—as it has been pointed out above—very little is known (in some cases, even the self-denomination of their speakers is obscure). Menges reported about the existence of turcophone groups in Baluchistan and Mekran in southeastern Persia (Menges, 1951, p. 279). However, he neither wrote anything about their languages and dialects nor gave their exact self-denominations. Also, it appears that Doerfer did not agree with Menges’ assumption (Doerfer, 1970, p. 219). Another group, which had settled to the south of Tehran and which reportedly speaks Chaghatay (Eastern Turkish; see [CHAGHATAY LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE](#)), was mentioned in a letter to G. Doerfer by László Szimonisz, who stayed in that region in 1965. By the same occasion, speakers of a language of the Kipchak/Qipchaq ([Qepčāq](#)) group are also referred to in the same area (Doerfer, 1969, p. 15). Yet, these groups have not been named by their respective ethnonyms either. Another group of people, about whose language and identity nearly nothing is known, includes the speakers of the above-mentioned unknown language called “Berberi,” which is reportedly spoken in



few villages in Khorasan (Doerfer, 1969, pp. 15-16).

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