

A historical-comparative glimpse on Laki dialects

Sara Belelli, postdoctoral research fellow, Tuscia University, Viterbo (Italy)

Laki is the language spoken by ethnic Laks in an area of west Iran unofficially known as Lakestān, centred in the north-eastern regions of historical Luristan (i.e., Pish-e Kuh) – including the counties of Holeyān in Ilām Province, and Kuhdasht, Delfān, Selsele, Borujerd and Khorramābād in Lorestān Province – and extending towards the Southern Kurdish (SK)-speaking areas of Kermānshāh Province to the north, and the Lori-speaking areas of Hamadān Province to the east, with scattered exclaves outside this core territory.

It is commonly agreed that Laki is a “Northwestern” Iranian variety (or group of varieties) forming the southmost appendage of the Kurdish language spectrum. However, sources generally do not regard Laki as belonging to SK *stricto sensu* (see the discussion in Belelli, 2021: 21-25 and *passim*; Belelli, forthcoming). Others admit the possibility of classifying Laki as a Kurdish variety, yet underline that several (chiefly phonological and lexical) commonalities with Northern (Lorestāni) Lori shows the effects of extensive areal contact on some of its dialects (see the discussion in Anonby, 2004-2005). More impressionistic and less investigated views, such as Izady’s (1992: 174-175), assert a closer affinity of Laki to Gorani/Hawrami dialects historically spoken alongside SK in Kermānshāhān, pointing either to some kind of contact interference (“substrate” or “prestige borrowing” as assumed respectively by MacKenzie, 1961: 85-86 and Leezenberg 1993 for Central Kurdish; see Haig, 2019 for a reappraisal of the issue), or to closer linguistic kinship, beyond their shared “Northwesternness”.

While Laki historical phonology has been investigated in a few publications (Shahsavari, 2010; Aliyari Babolghani, 2021), which nonetheless leave the question of genetic classification open, the historical morphology of Laki remains a largely uncharted area of research, also due to incomplete – yet, not totally inexistent – documentation. Except for a typologically oriented treatment of Laki pronominal clitics (Mohammadirad, 2020), no comprehensive attempt at contextualizing the morphosyntactic characteristics of documented Laki dialects within the (North)western Iranian group is available. Indeed, this language only marginally features in the most recent treatments of New Western Iranian nominal morphosyntax (Shuan O. Karim, 2021; 2022).

Of course, disentangling the stratification and development of salient (core) structural features of Laki, with some dialectological acquaintance, represents a crucial endeavour towards reaching a deeper understanding of genealogical relationships (and/or contact interference) between the three main language varieties spoken in the southmost Kurdophone regions of Western Iran – i.e., SK, Gorani, and Laki – as well as other Iranian contact languages, among which Lori and Persian.

The proposed contribution will attempt at characterizing Laki dialects in the light of what is known on its closest linguistic neighbours, in the hope of providing fresh, systematically arranged material to integrate the latest advancements on the topic.

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