

Archaism and Innovation in Kurdish

Shuan Osman Karim

shuan.karim@uni-wuerzburg.de

Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg

Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung

SCIAS

March 24, 2025

Outline

- 1 How Old is a language
- 2 Breaking Myths
- 3 Iranian Languages
- 4 The Character of Iranian
- 5 Archaism and Innovation in Kurdish

Outline

- 1 How Old is a language
- 2 Breaking Myths
- 3 Iranian Languages
- 4 The Character of Iranian
- 5 Archaism and Innovation in Kurdish

How old is a language?

- A language can be Old because it was spoken long ago.
- A language can be Old because it has been written down for a long time.
- A language can be Old because it has remained “Unchanged” for a long period of time.

OLD: of a bygone era I

- Hittite



OLD: of a bygone era II

- Sumerian



OLD: of a bygone era III

- Akkadian



OLD: of a bygone era IV

- Aramaic



OLD: of a bygone era V

- Sanskrit



OLD: of a literary tradition I

- Old Irish



OLD: of a literary tradition II

- Old Church Slavonic

ПѢВІАКЪ РАЗУМУ ПРНВОУ ДНІ ПСЕ
 ННЮ · ПОМНОВА ВЪ РОДѢ ТЛѢ · ПОСЛА
 НМЪ СТГО КШЕ ГАНГІ НА ФЛОСОФА
 НА РИЦА ЕМАГО КН РИЛА · МЪЖА ПРАВЕ
 ДНА И ИСТИННА · НСЪТВОРИ МЪ, Л ·
 ПИСМЕНА НОСМЪ · ѠВА ДѢШГОУТНКОУ
 ГРѢТЬСКИХЪ ПИСМЕНЪ · ѠВАЖЕ ПОМО
 ВЪ ИСТѢ НРѢУИ · ѠПРѢВАГОЖЕНАТЕ

OLD: of a literary tradition III

■ Old English

OE (West Saxon dialect, late ninth century)

þū ūre fæder, þe eart on heofonum, sīe þīn nama gehālgod. Cume þīn rīce. Sīe þīn pylla on eorþan spā spā on heofonum. Syle ūs tōdæg ūrne dægþāmlican hlāf. And forġief ūs ūre gyltas spā spā pē forġiefap þām þe pið ūs agyltaþ. And ne læd þū nū ūs on costnunge, ac ālīes ūs fram yfele.

ME (Central Midlands, c. 1380)

Oure fadir, þat art in heuenys, halewid be þi name. þi kyngdom come to. Be þi wile don ase in heuene and in erþe. 3iue to us þis day oure breed ouer oþer substaunse. And forziue to us oure dettes, as and we forziuen to oure dettouris. And leede us not into temptaciouns, but delyuere us from yuel.

EModE (Book of Common Prayer, 1549)

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil.

OLD: of archaism

	German				English			
	M	N	F	PL	M	N	F	PL
NOM	<i>er</i>	<i>es</i>	<i>sie</i>		<i>he</i>	<i>it</i>	<i>she</i>	<i>they</i>
ACC	<i>ihn</i>		<i>sie</i>		<i>him</i>		<i>her</i>	<i>them</i>
DAT	<i>ihm</i>		<i>ihr</i>	<i>ihnen</i>	<i>his</i>	<i>its</i>	<i>their</i>	
GEN	<i>sein</i>							

Outline

- 1 How Old is a language
- 2 Breaking Myths**
- 3 Iranian Languages
- 4 The Character of Iranian
- 5 Archaism and Innovation in Kurdish

All languages are equally old

English and German are sisters. Languages tend to innovate along one axis and be more conservative along another.

English	German
<i>apple</i>	<i>apfel</i>
<i>up</i>	<i>auf</i>
<i>to</i>	<i>zu</i>
<i>out</i>	<i>aus</i>
<i>book</i>	<i>buch</i>

Greek and Sanskrit I

	Greek		Sanskrit	
	SG	PL	SG	PL
VOC	<i>-a</i>	<i>-ai</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-āh</i>
NOM	<i>-as</i>	<i>-ai</i>	<i>-as</i>	<i>-āh</i>
ACC	<i>-an</i>	<i>-as</i>	<i>-am</i>	<i>-ān</i>
INS			<i>-ena</i>	<i>-āih</i>
DAT	<i>-a</i>	<i>-ais</i>	<i>-āya</i>	<i>-āibhyah</i>
INS			<i>-āt</i>	<i>-āibhyah</i>
GEN	<i>-ou</i>	<i>-ōn</i>	<i>-asya</i>	<i>-ānām</i>
LOC			<i>-i</i>	<i>-āsu</i>

Greek and Sanskrit II

	Greek		Sanskrit	
	give	carry	give	carry
1SG	<i>dídōmi</i>	<i>phérō</i>	<i>dadāmi</i>	<i>bharāmi</i>
2SG	<i>dídōs</i>	<i>phéreis</i>	<i>dadāsi</i>	<i>bharasi</i>
3SG	<i>dídōsi</i>	<i>phérei</i>	<i>dadāti</i>	<i>bharati</i>
1PL	<i>dídomen</i>	<i>phéromen</i>	<i>dadāmah</i>	<i>bharāmah</i>
2PL	<i>dídote</i>	<i>phérete</i>	<i>dadatha</i>	<i>bharatha</i>
3PL	<i>didóasin</i>	<i>phérousin</i>	<i>dadati</i>	<i>bharanti</i>

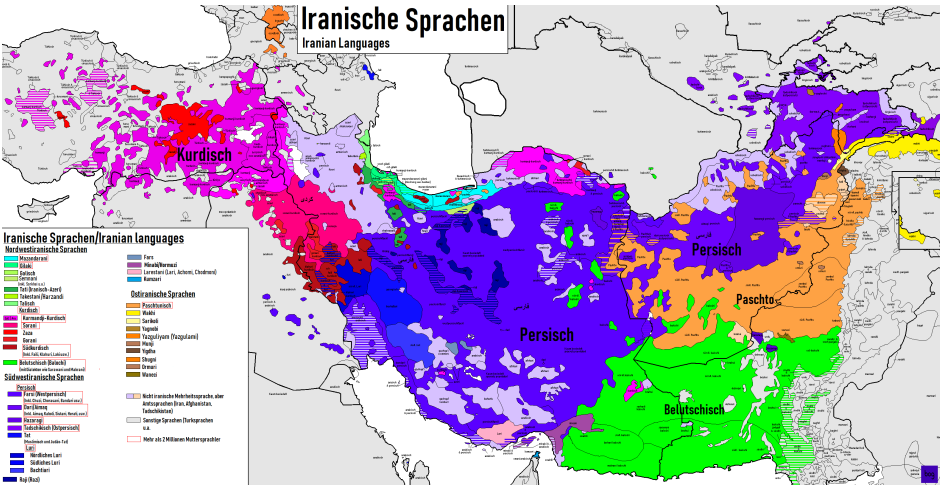
Sir William Jones (1746-1794)

The Sanscrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have spring from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists: there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothick and the Celtick, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanscrit, and the old Persian might be added to this family, if this were the place for discussing any question concerning the antiquities of Persia.

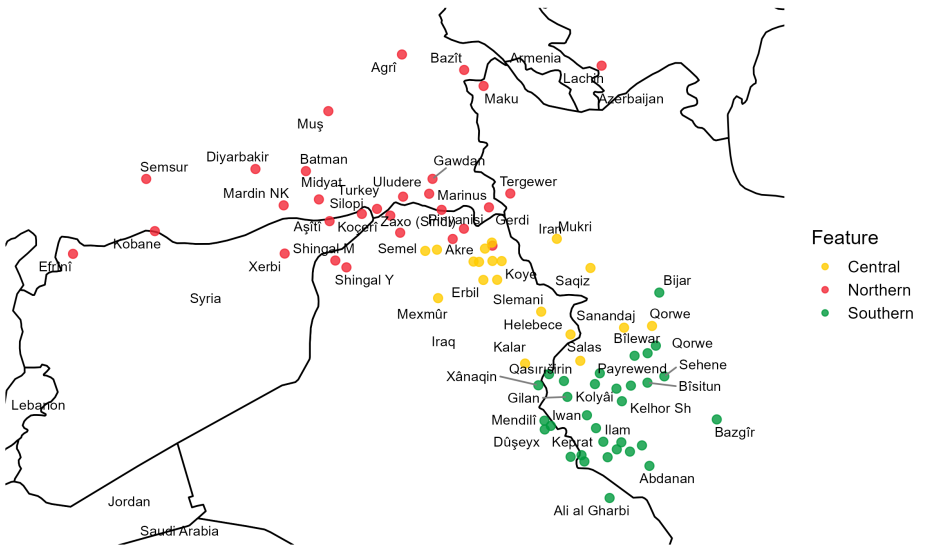
Outline

- 1 How Old is a language
- 2 Breaking Myths
- 3 Iranian Languages**
- 4 The Character of Iranian
- 5 Archaism and Innovation in Kurdish

The Iranian Languages



Kurdish



Kurdish Folk I



Kurdish Folk II



Kurdish Folk III



Hewraman



Zab



Rewanduz



© M. H. Mohammadi - Photograph - 2017

Amadî



Outline

- 1 How Old is a language
- 2 Breaking Myths
- 3 Iranian Languages
- 4 The Character of Iranian**
- 5 Archaism and Innovation in Kurdish

Tense-based alignment split

Northern Kurdish:

- (1) *ez nan dixwim*
 Ich (das) Brot esse
 I (the) bread eat
 'I eat bread.'
- (2) *min nan xwar*
 mein (das) Brot gegessen (ist)
 my (the) bread eaten (is)
 'I ate bread.'

Hewramî (Text):

- (3) *min panîrekeî werû*
 Ich den Käse esse
 I the cheese eat
 'I eat bread.'
- (4) *min panîreke war*
 mein der Käse gegessen (ist)
 my the bread eaten (is)
 'I ate bread.'

Evolution of the split: Example from Mt. Bisitun



Evolution of the split: the Achaemenid royal inscription



Evolution of the split: Example Old Persian

(5) *adam hamaranam akunavam*

ich (die) Schlacht tat

I (the) battle did

'I battled.'

(6) *manā hamaranam kartam*

mein (die) Schlacht getan (ist)

my (the) battle done (is)

'I have battled.'

Two cases; two genders

	M	F	PL
DIR	<i>æsb-∅</i>	<i>kærg-æ</i>	<i>textitæsb-e/kærg-e</i>
OBL	<i>æsb-i</i>	<i>kærg-é</i>	<i>æsb-án/kærg-án</i>

Vafsi case (Stilo, 2008, p. 703)

	M	F	PL
DIR	<i>arwêş-∅</i>	<i>arwêş-∅</i>	<i>arwêş-i</i>
OBL	<i>arwêş-i</i>	<i>arwêş(-er)-∅</i>	<i>arwêş-an</i>

Zazaki Case (Paul, 1998)

Evolution of case: Rhythmic Law I

	(a) [SG]	(a) [PL]	(ā) [SG]	(ā) [PL]
VOC	yas.na	yas.nā	daē.ne	daē.nā
NOM	yas.nō	yas.nā	daē.na	daē.nā
ACC	yas.nəm	yas.nə	daē.nəm	daē.nā
INS	yas.na	yas.nāiš	daē.na.ya	daē.nābiš
DAT	yas.nāi	yas.naē.ibyō	daē.na.yāi	daē.nā.byō
ABL	yas.nāt	yas.naē.ibyō	daē.na.yāt	daē.nā.byō
GEN	yas.ne.he	yas.nā.nəm	daē.na.yā	daē.nā.nəm
LOC	yas.ne	yas.naē.šū	daē.na.ya	daē.nā.hu

Evolution of case: Rhythmic Law II

	(a) [SG]	(a) [PL]	(ā) [SG]	(ā) [PL]
VOC	yas.n	yas.n	daē.n	daē.n
NOM	yas.n	yas.n	daē.n	daē.n
ACC	yas.n	yas.n	daē.n	daē.n
GEN	yas.ne.h	yas.nā.n	daē.na.y	daē.nā.n
INS	yas.n	yas.n	daē.na.y	daē.nā.b
DAT	yas.n	yas.naē.ib	daē.na.y	daē.nā.b
ABL	yas.n	yas.naē.ib	daē.na.y	daē.nā.b
LOC	yas.n	yas.naē.š	daē.na.y	daē.nā.h

Evolution of case: Northern Kurdish (Dihok)

	M		F	
	[SG]	[PL]	[SG]	[PL]
VOC				
NOM	<i>cejin</i>	<i>cejin</i>	<i>dîn</i>	<i>dîn</i>
ACC				
GEN	<i>cejinî</i>	<i>cejinan</i>	<i>dînê</i>	<i>dînan</i>

Outline

- 1 How Old is a language
- 2 Breaking Myths
- 3 Iranian Languages
- 4 The Character of Iranian
- 5 Archaism and Innovation in Kurdish

Case and Alignment

Northern Kurdish:

(7) *ez nan dixwim*
Ich Brot(das) esse
I bread(the) eat
'I eat bread.'

(8) *min nan xwar*
mein Brot(das) gegessen (ist)
my bread(the) eaten (is)
'I ate bread.'

Central Kurdish:

(9) *panîr-eke exom*
Käse-der esse
cheese-the eat
'I eat the bread.'

Central Kurdish (continued):

(10) *panîr-eke=m xward*
Käse-der=mein gegessen
bread-the=my eaten
'I ate the bread.'

Southern Kurdish:

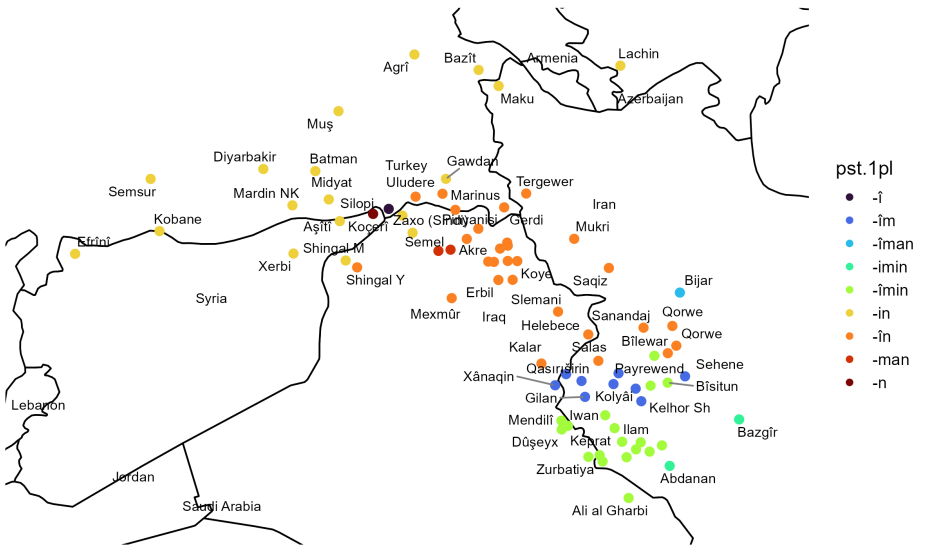
(11) *panîr-ege xom*
Käse-der esse
cheese-the eat
'I eat the bread.'

(12) *panîr-ege xwardim*
Käse-der äße
bread-the ate
'I ate the bread.'

Agreement I

	NK	CK	SK1	SK2	SK3	Lekî
1SG	<i>-m</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-m</i>
3SG	<i>-î</i>	<i>-î</i>	<i>-î</i>	<i>-î</i>	<i>-î</i>	<i>-î</i>
3SG	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-∅</i>	<i>-∅</i>
1PL	<i>-n</i>	<i>-în</i>	<i>-în</i>	<i>-îmn</i>	<i>-îm</i>	<i>-îm</i>
2PL	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-în</i>	<i>-în</i>	<i>-îd</i>
3PL	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-n</i>

Agreement II



Zor supastan ekem!

Vielen Dank!

Thank you much!

References I

- Fattah, Ismaïl Kamandar (2000). *Les dialectes kurdes méridionaux: étude linguistique et dialectologique*. Acta Iranica 37. Louvain: Peeters. ISBN: 978-90-429-0918-2 978-2-87723-524-2.
- Karim, Shuan Osman (2021). "The synchrony and diachrony of New Western Iranian nominal morphosyntax". PhD thesis. Ohio: The Ohio State University dissertation.
- Mohammadirad, Masoud (accepted). *A grammar of Hewramî*. Language Science Press.
- Mohammadirad, Masoud and Shuan Osman Karim (in review). "The typology of verbal person/number syncretism in Western Iranian languages". In.
- Paul, Ludwig (1998). *Zazaki. Grammatik und Versuch einer Dialektologie*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- Skjærvø, Prods Oktor (2009). "Old Iranian". In: *The Iranian Languages*. Ed. by Gernot Windfuhr. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 43–195.
- Stilo, Donald (Nov. 2008). "Case in Iranian: From reduction and loss to innovation and renewal". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. Ed. by Andrej L. Malchukov and Andrew Spencer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 700–715. ISBN: 978-0-19-920647-6.