

Historical Change of Sound “b” in Kalhori Dialect of Kurdish Language

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Abstract

Recorded languages have always been one of the main tools for inquiry about ancient times and their relationships with Present. In this study Kalhori, a sub-dialect of Kurdish, is investigated under the assumption of retaining one of the original initial sounds of words i.e. /w/ in Old Persian's morphological system. The significant point in doing this is the fact of substituting this sound with /b/ in earlier times before transiting to Pahlavi and Dari Period. Though this sound shifted to /b/ whenever occurred to be the first sound of a word, Kalhori has retained it not only in that position in original Kurdish terms, but also substituted /b/ with /w/ within other areas of borrowed words under specific rules to utilize Dari words in Kurdish conversations. This process is not specified for nouns, other grammatical classes also retained the same change.

Key words: Kurdish; Kalhori; Sound change; Ancient times

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INTRODUCTION

Kurdish, an Iranian language, belongs to the Indo-Iranian sub-branch of the Indo-European language family. Gunter (2003) expresses that the term apparently is taken from Kardouchoi¹ in ancient time. But “today with the growth of Kurdish nationalism, the name is used to embrace almost all the people and tribes living between Turks and Arabs on the west and Persians proper on the east” (MacKenzie, 1961, p.69). In Iran different geographical living places and lifestyles have brought about a variety of dialects of Kurdish language. Its prominent dialects each possessing unique syntactical, morphological and phonological properties of their own have been variously classified so far, but a widely accepted classification is offered by Haig (2004) in which Northern, Central, Southern and a group of residual languages are included. Amongst them Gunter (2003; 2004) introduced *Kalhoi* as the language spoken by the members of one of the largest Kurdish tribes belonging to southern group located in Kermanshah province of Iran.

As Sampson (1980) proposed, American linguists asserted all languages spoken by human beings possess the same values and vernaculars should not be left out or marginalized in research on languages as being primitive or valueless. As a possession owned by human beings, it is worth investigating all languages as the way to get into anthropology and know human beings' various aspects. Zomorodian (2001) indicated that making inquiries about vernacular languages and dialects after being substituted by an official language can provide rich sources by which studies on linguistics, literature, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and history can be carried out. In Iran collecting data from languages and dialects

¹ Recorded by the Greek historian Xenophon in his *Anabasis*, an independent people living in *Zagros mountains* who gave the Greeks a terrible beating during their retreat from Persia in 401 B.C.E. Many scholars believe that the Kardouchoi were the ancestors of today's Kurds. (Gunter, 2003, p.93-94)

and their scientific description are the keys to uncover many of philological, grammatical, phonological and morphological unknowns.

Historically, Iranian languages have passed three main eras since ancient times, known as Old, Middle and New era² and “it is more than a thousand years since the beginning of Dari period” (Baqeri, 2008, p.27-40). Dari has been established as the official language of the country used for broadcasting, schooling, judicial, political systems and formal settings in general. Influencing the vernaculars in a great extent as such many of Dari words are used widely by their native speakers. Talking about the sociolinguistics or psycholinguistics impacts of its influences or tendencies of individuals to accept the impacts is out of the scope of this study.

So far little research has been carried out on

Kurdish (F.R Akrawy, 1982; Zinar, 1989-1997; Chyet, 2003; Boulden & Germiyanai, 2008; Diloan, 2008; Kreyenbrook & Marzolph, 2010; Bahimi, 2010; Rhea 2010) and much less has been said about *Kalhari* and as far as our knowledge concerns no serious work observed on this dialect. This research attempts to look at Kalhari in the sense of its relations to Old Persian i.e. the language spoken by Persians’ancestors since etymologies of many words in Kalhari show they originally rooted in ancient times. Despite main changes imposed to each language over time as Campbell stresses (2004, p.6-8) “sound change, borrowing and analogical change” Kalhari has retained the original roots of many of its terms and has been free from some changes transiting Middle Persian to New. The one examined in this paper is /w/ into /b/ sound shift.

Table 1

Old	Middle	New	Kalhari	Meaning
væha:r	wæha:r	bæha:r	wæha:r	spring
va:tæ	wa:	ba:d	wa:	wind
væfr	wæfr	bærf	wæfr	snow
væøkæ	wærg	bærg	wæg	leaf

Most interestingly, it seems that this dialect considers the sound /w/ to be as a part of its phonological system of word formation since it changes the /b/ sound in many of Dari’s lexemes to /w/ to make them native terms. Evidences exist in all word classes, for instance, the adjective /ba:z/ exists in Kalhari as /wa:z/ means “open”.

In this study we collected our data by asking fifteen native speakers of Kalhari to provide us with corresponding translations of the terms in Dari. As they were college students and supposed to be influenced by the official language of education and not offer the correct pronunciations, we ask them to enquire about the data from their parents and grandparents or elder members of their families. For collecting data they used voice recorders, then they were written down on paper according to IPA phonetics. To validate the data they were checked again by interviewing ten other native speakers whom were asked to utter the words which their pictures were on cards. In the following, first we present some words of noun class and their historical changes from Old Persian to Dari, next the comparison of Pahlavi words and Kalhari’s are represented, then this comparison is

conducted between Dari and Kalhari, and finally words of different word classes are examined. To make it brief, we tried to shorten the number of examples and bring as sufficient as possible though the amount of examples in some classes are much more.

1. HISTORICAL SOUND CHANGES IN PERSIAN

Languages are subjected to radical or gradual changes for various causes showing that they are alive and dynamic. What generally Changed Old Persian to what we call it Dari are a list of changes³ among which phoneme changes matter to this study (Baqeri, 2009).

Phoneme changes in turn are of seven kinds⁴ (Baqeri, 2009) which absence of one is observable in Kalhari though the other dialect apparently adopted to the change.

As Baqeri (2009, p.136) pointed out “The most interesting point here to be noted about sound changes in Persian is that initial sounds broadly are not subjected to the phoneme changes and will remain unchanged in this

² Pahlavi is one of the languages of Middle and Dari is the alternate name for New era.

³ For more details see “History of Persian Language” (Baqeri, 2008, p.127)

⁴ The other six phoneme changes are as follow:

[1] /tʃ/ into /tʃ/, /z/ and /x/ [4] /rd/ into /l/

[2] /d/ into /h/, /y/ [5] /p/ into /w/, /b/ and /f/

[3] /h/ into /x/ and /Ø/ [6] /g/ into /x/, /y/, /i/, /Ø/ and /tʃ/

The choice of phonemes with which the original ones are replaced depends on various factors such as the kind of phonemes preceded or followed by originals or original phoneme positions within a word as being in initial, middle or final position.

language. But “if /y/⁵ and /w/ happen to be the *first* sound of a word scarcely remain unchanged.

I) /w/ → /b/ if it is before /ɑ:/

(e.g., [wɑ:] → [bɑ:d])

or

/w/ → /b/ if it is before /æ/

(e.g., [væɾəkæ] → [bæɾg])

Kalhori has a number of words which do not match these rules. Some of them are residue of old Persian words and the other are from Middle Persian and the third group includes extra examples from Dari which have not been adopted to the ancient time rules. Here are some examples; regarding the amount of documents at hand the number of examples vary.

Table 2⁶

Old Persian	Pahlavi	Dari	Kalhori	Meaning
væha:ɾ	wæha:ɾ	bæha:ɾ	wæha:ɾ	spring
wa:tæ	wa:t	ba:d	wa:	wind
wæfɾæ	wæfɾ	bærf	wæfɾ	snow
væɾəkæ	wæɾg	bæɾg	wæɾg	leaf

It is observable that despite the regular changes to Old Persian, Kalhori has not undertaken the changes in many of its words and retained the past forms which actually are of Middle period.

2. THE SOUND CHANGE IN PAHLAVI AND KALHORI

Table 3

Pahlavi	Dari	Kalhori	Meaning
wa:d	ba:d	wa:	wind
wæɾæg	bæɾe	wæɾk	lamb
wa:ra:n	ba:ra:n	wa:ra:n	rainy
wæɾg	bæɾg	wæɾg	leaf
wa:da:m	ba:da:m	wa:yəm	almond
wætʃa:g	bætʃe	wætʃkæ	infant/baby
wæɾ	bæɾ	wæɾ	
wæfɾ	bærf	wæfɾ	snow
wæha:ɾ	bæha:ɾ	wæha:ɾ	spring
zu:wa:n	zæba:n	zu:wa:n	tongue

The sound change that we are talking about, actually occurs when /w/ happen to be the first sound of a word but it seems that this dialect uses it in different manners regardless of the position of /w/ in words. As the last example of Table 3 shows, in Pahlavi /w/ in the middle of the word /zu:wa:n/ changed into /b/ but again it follows the rule of preceding the vowel /ɑ:/.

3. COMPARISON OF SOUND CHANGE IN DARI AND KALHORI

The absence of change in words borrowed from Dari is widely visible. Because of the wide range of words contain /w/ instead of /b/ we avoid repeating Dari words represented in Table 4 and introduce new ones.

⁵ This sound change is not supposed to be discussed here, just enough to say that it shifted to /tʃ/ sound, for instance: /yimæ/ → /yæm/ → /tʃæm/; /yimæ/ → /yæm/ → /tʃæm/.

⁶ The sound changes of these words are:

[1] Final sounds elision.

[2] A voiced, labial-velar, approximant vowel /w/ conversion to a voiced bilabial, stop, consonant /b/.

[3] Metathesis which changed /wæfɾ/ to /bærf/.

[4] A voiceless velar stop /k/ conversion to a voiced velar stop /g/.

Table 4

Dari	Kalhari	Meaning
Tæb	too	Fever
a:b	a:w	Water
ʃæb	ʃoo	Night
ɛmʃæb	imʃoo	tonight
ba:ba:	ba:wg	Dad
æbr̥	ɔwɾ̥	Cloud
ʃæba:n	ʃɔwa:n	shepherd
bɪa:ba:n	bɪa:wa:n	Desert
tæbær	Tæwær	Ax
Kæbk	kook	partridge
næba:t	næwæ:t	candy
xɑ:b	xɑ:w	Asleep
Sæbr	soor	patience
keta:b	keta:w	Book
kæba:b	kæwa:w	Kebab
ʃæbdær̥	ʃoodær̥	Vlover

Suffice to bring further examples, it is time to speak of general rules behind the change /w/ into /b/ in this dialect.

4.1 Rules Behind the Changes

As it was proposed before, this dialect has expanded the change to the other areas within words containing /b/. From the evidences we have at hand whenever the change /w/ into /b/ does occur in borrowed words the rules are:

1. /w/ → /b/ if it is before /ɑ:/

Except for the case of [ba:ba:] which the first one remains unchanged.

(e.g., [kæba:b] → [kæwa:w])

2. /w/ → /b/ if it is before /æ/

(e.g., [kæba:b] → [kæwa:w])

3. /w/ → /b/ if it is the final sound.

(e.g., [xɑ:b] → [xɑ:w])

4. /w/ → /b/ if it is before a consonant.

(e.g., [æbr̥] → [ɔwɾ̥])

In compound words also these rules are applied. For example:

[ʃæbgær̥d] → [ʃoogær̥d]

[keta:bxɑ:nə] → [keta:wxɑ:nə]

4.2 Examples of Not Changing

There are a handful of borrowed terms containing /b/ in mentioned positions used without changing to /w/ in everyday use which are not Kurdish terms originally. Here are few examples:

Table 5

Dari	Kalhari	Meaning
ba:γ	ba:x	garden
sæbu:ɾ̥	sæbu:ɾ̥	patient
bæxt	bæxt	chance/fortune
tæbr̥ik	tæbr̥ik	congratulation

5. SOUND CHANGES IN OTHER WORD CLASSES

The process of not changing is not exclusively applicable to nouns also some cases in other word classes are alike. (To be short, for some grammatical classes few examples are presented though the others have limited ones.)

Adjectives

The adjective [wɪʃɑ:d] in Pahlavi has passed below changes when arrived to Dari:

/w/ → /g/

/ɪ/ → /ɔ:/

Today, Dari speakers pronounce it as [gɔ:ʃɑ:d], thus Kalhari retained the original sound /w/ and pronounces it with a little change as [wəʃɑ:]

The examples of adjectives in Dari are more than what exist in Pahlavi. In table 6 some are represented:

⁷ The change of /w/ into /g/ is another regular change from Old Persian to Middle and New. The processes are ruled as follow:

/w/ → /g/ if it is before /ɪ/

/w/ → /g/ if it is before /ə/

/w/ → /g/ if it is before /ɔ:/

Table 6

Dari	Kalhori	Meaning
bɑ:z	wɑ:z	Open
bær ⁸	wær	result/fruit
xæra:b	xæra:w	Defective
tʃærb	tʃɔwɾ ⁹	Greasy
kæbud	kɔ:w	Azure
sæbz	sɔ:wz	Green

Verbs

Verb class also contains examples of this kind. in Pahlavi the verb “to rain” was [wɑ:ɾɪdæn], taken from the noun [wɑ:ɾɑ:n], today the same root of verb is used in Kalhori, the one which had changed in Dari.

Adverbs

As the number of adverbs and prepositions are less than the other categories the examples also are the like. Examples of Dari for these kinds are more at hand such as the difference between [ɛmfæb] and [ɪmfɔʊ].

Prepositions

The propositions containing /b/ sound in Dari are limit. but often the ones exist follow the rule of changing to /w/.

ba:

mæn **ba:** Ali ræftæm
 mæ **wæ gærda** Ali tʃim
 I with Ali went(1st Sing)
 ‘I went with Ali.’

bɛ

bɛ Ali gɔ:ftæm
wæ Ali wætəm
 pre Ali told(1st Sing)
 ‘I told Mehdi.’

bær

Ali bɛ /zɛ bæræm nɛtʃæst
 Ali nɪtʃtæ wæra wærəm
 Ali sat front me
 ‘Ali sat in front of me.’

DISCUSSION AND THE RESULTS

As being governed by powers of the day, the kurds have always been seeking a way to find freedom. Different imposed political situations determined their geographical living places and lifestyles, therefore, to achieve freedom, national identity and being independent for so long they

sought refuge in mountains. Preserving Kurdish language as a symbol of solidarity also was one of their main concerns which also implied using a writing system. These may be one of the main reasons how after passing more than two thousand years the kurds could successfully retain their language and many of ancient times original initial vowels amongst which one was examined in this paper. It uses Arabic alphabet which cannot represent some of its phonological features properly. Though the impact and infiltration of official languages in history of the Kurds were inevitable, they could not revolute this dialect since besides the vowels, many terms of Kalhori rooted in ancient times. Despite many controversial debates on this dialect which we will try to announce later, for narrowing the scope of this study we focused just on absence of one of main phonological changes in history of Iranian languages.

According to the data and studies on Iranian languages, Avestan and Old Persian shifted the initial sound /w/ to /b/ transiting to what we call it Dari or New Persian but Kalhori has not undertaken this sound change and retained it as one of the heritage of ancient times though the other dialects of main groups of Kurdish adopted themselves to this change or the others. The inquiry about the other borrowed terms of this dialect from Dari which is the influencing and official language of the country indicates that this dialect is trying to retain this vowel not only in initial position, but in other areas within words and utilize it as a possession for word formation. But this process is not irregular and occurs under specific rules.

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⁸This adjective when is used alone pronounced as [bær] but when used with a prefix [bæ] means ‘without’ is pronounced as [wær]

⁹In this adjective metathesis also has occurred.