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Kordestan Province in the *Atlas of the Languages of Iran*: Research process, language distribution, and language classification

Erik Anonby, Masoud Mohammadirad & Jaffer Sheyholislami

Abstract: Kordestan is one of four provinces in Iran where Kurdish is the main spoken language. A small number of studies of specific language varieties in Kordestan Province have appeared, and the province is featured as part of several general regional or country-wide maps of language distribution. Until now, however, no systematic study on the language situation in this province has been published. The present paper, which seeks to address this gap, provides an account of the research currently being carried out on Kordestan Province of Iran in the context of the *Atlas of the Languages of Iran* (ALI) research programme. After introducing the Atlas project and the research team for Kordestan, we look at the role of existing data sources in the Atlas, including the production of a background map and an online bibliography of language-related resources. The main portion of the paper deals with the collection of new data, consisting of local place names and language distribution data, combined with existing data sets and mapped out to the level of each settlement. The results of our study show that the language situation in Kordestan Province is more diverse than often assumed, with six important high-level varieties represented: Central Kurdish, Southern Kurdish, Hawrami, Turkic, Persian and Aramaic. Most of these varieties also show significant internal variation, as shown by our inventory and initial classification of all major subvarieties. The study concludes with reflections on the importance of a fine-grained and systematic approach to investigating the language situation, the limitations of this type of large-scale study, and possibilities for further research that refines and builds on the findings presented here.

1 Introduction¹

Kordestan Province of Iran, with a population of just over 1.6 million (ISC 2016), is one of four provinces in Iran – along with Kermanshah, Ilam and West Azerbaijan² – where Kurdish is the main spoken language. Located in the north-west part of the country, Kordestan is bounded to the north by Central Kurdish-speaking regions of West Azerbaijan Province of Iran; the primarily Turkic-speaking provinces of Zanjan and Hamadan to the east; the Southern Kurdish-dominated Kermanshah Province to the south; and Central Kurdish-speaking areas in the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq to the west.

A handful of studies covering specific language varieties in Kordestan Province have been published (Fattah 2000; Sohrābi & Serish Ābādi 2009; Kordzafarānlu Kāmbuziā & Sajjadi 2013; Sajjadi & Kordzafarānlu Kāmbuziā 2014), along with a larger number of MA theses (e.g. Rezāi 1996; Teymuri 1998; Hasanzādeh 1999; Khaliqi 2001; Mohammadi 2002). The province is also featured as part of several overview maps of Kurdish (Hassanpour 1992, revised in Haig & Öpengin 2014 and Sheyholislami 2015; Izady 1998; Matras & Koontz-Garboden 2017, and related studies including Anonby (forthcoming)) and general maps of language distribution across Iran (*Atlas Narodov Mira* 1964, *TAVO* 1988, *Compendium* 1989, Izady 2006–13, *Irancarto* 2012). It is commonly assumed that Central Kurdish is the characteristic language of the province as a whole (e.g., “Kurdistan Province” in *Wikipedia*³). However, no detailed or systematic study has been published which focuses on the language situation in this province, although Khādemi’s (2002) MA thesis is an important

¹An earlier version of this paper was presented by the authors at the *3rd International Conference on Kurdish Linguistics* (ICKL3), University of Amsterdam, August 25–26, 2016. The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions of SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada), Carleton University, Universität Bamberg, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 665850. We are grateful for insightful and detailed feedback from an anonymous referee and the volume editors.

²As is the case for most other parts of Iran, there are no reliable or detailed data on language distribution in West Azerbaijan Province. A number of districts in the province are majority Azerbaijani-speaking, including the capital city of Orumieh (Urmia). Because of this – and perhaps also because of the province’s name – it is often assumed that Azerbaijani is the main language of the province as a whole. However, our own preliminary investigations of this topic, which are based on district-by-district calculations, together with the maps found in *Irancarto* (2012), suggest that Kurdish may in fact be the mother tongue of a slight majority of the province’s population.

³Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdistan_Province (accessed April 23, 2019).

effort in this direction. The present study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

This paper provides an account of the research currently being carried out on Kordestan Province of Iran in the context of the *Atlas of the Languages of Iran* (ALI) research programme (Anonby & Taheri-Ardali, et al. 2015–2019; Anonby et al. 2019). It consists of an outline of the research process and the findings that have been generated so far. Our investigation, which has been conducted to the level of each settlement, provides a first detailed and comprehensive picture of language distribution in Kordestan Province.

After introducing the Atlas research team for Kordestan Province, we look at the incorporation of existing data sources, including key demographic and geographic sources, the production of a background map for mapping language in Kordestan Province, and a continuously developed bibliography of linguistic and sociolinguistic references.

The main portion of the paper deals with the collection of new data, consisting of local place names and language distribution data. An extensive discussion of methodology precedes an inventory and analysis of the results for both of these topics. In the section on local place names, we show that this seemingly peripheral step in the research makes several important contributions to the overall objective of understanding the language situation. The core of the research treats language distribution and classification for the major varieties and subvarieties of Kordestan Province, investigated and mapped out to the level of each settlement. The results of our study show that the language situation is more diverse than often assumed, with six important high-level varieties represented: Central Kurdish, Southern Kurdish, Hawrami, Turkic, Persian and Aramaic. Special attention is given to the labelling and internal classification of Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish, for which the dialect situation presents a number of complexities.

The study concludes with reflections on the importance of a fine-grained and systematic approach to investigating the language situation, limitations of this type of large-scale investigation, and possibilities for further research that refines and builds on the results of this research.

2 The *Atlas of the Languages of Iran* (ALI)

There have been a number of important efforts to map of the languages of Iran, but until now no language atlas, or even a comprehensive and detailed country-level language map, has been produced. As detailed in Anonby (2015),

this can be attributed to a variety of factors including the complexity of language situation; issues of logistics and project design; contrasting perspectives on language identity and distribution; limited dissemination of project results; and limited cooperation among scholars working toward this common goal.

After five years of planning, work on the *Atlas of the Languages of Iran* (ALI) (test version: <http://iranatlas.net>) began in earnest when seed funding was obtained in 2014. In this research programme (Anonby et al. 2019), an atlas of the country's languages is being developed by an international team of over 80 volunteer scholars and students. This atlas, which includes each of Iran's some 60,000 cities and villages, brings together existing publications and new data. It is capable of remote contributions by scholars and popular users and moderation of input by atlas editors. Because ALI brings together the work of many different people, it provides references to each data source, whether published work, collaborator field notes or user contributions. Fundamental to the purpose of the Atlas, it is designed to facilitate comparison of language distribution maps with maps based on attested linguistic forms (Anonby et al. 2016; Anonby & Sabethematabadi (In press)). ALI is being built by GCRC (Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre): <https://gcr.c.carleton.ca> using the open-source Nunaliit Atlas Framework (<http://nunaliit.org>; GCRC 2013), which comes with a ready-made atlas template. The language mapping functionality developed in the present research programme, presented in Anonby et al. (In press), is continuously incorporated into the Nunaliit platform and made freely available to other scholars on GitHub (<https://github.com/GCRC/nunaliit>).

The present research on Kordestan Province has been carried out in the context of this larger research programme. It is the third major geographical focus in the Atlas, preceded by initial work on the provinces of Hormozgan (Mohebbi Bahmani et al. 2015) and Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari (Taheri-Ardali et al. 2015; Anonby & Taheri-Ardali 2018; Taheri-Ardali & Anonby 2019); and it is being followed by detailed studies of language in Bushehr (research team: Nemati et al.), Kermanshah (Fattahi et al.) and Ilam (Aliakbari et al. 2014, Gheitasi et al.). With each new province, we are streamlining the research process and methodology for collection, analysis and presentation of the data.

3 Research process for Kordestan province in ALI

In this section of the paper, we provide an overview of key aspects of the research process. First, we introduce the members of the research team who have contributed to this study. We then look at the use of existing data sources to provide a foundation and context for research on languages distribution in Kordestan Province. Finally, we introduce the ways in which this study contributes to an understanding of the language situation through the collection of new data through field research.

3.1 The Atlas team for Kordestan Province

The present research on Kordestan Province has been carried out by a large and diverse research team within the context of the ALI research programme. Researchers who contributed to the current study, listed according to their specific roles in the research on Kordestan Province in the Atlas, are as follows:

Erik Anonby (Carleton/Bamberg/GCRC)

Project leader, Atlas editor, data consistency

Masoud Mohammadirad (Hamadan/Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III)

Project consultant, field researcher, settlement localization

Jaffer Sheyholislami (Carleton)

Project consultant, bibliography, settlement localization

Mortaza Taheri-Ardali (IHCS/Shahrekord)

Atlas team coordinator

Fraser Taylor (Carleton/GCRC)

Project co-investigator

Amos Hayes (GCRC)

Geographic information technologist

J.-P. Fiset (GCRC)

Atlas programming

Robert Oikle (Carleton/GCRC)

Atlas design, map production

Adam Stone (Carleton)

Settlement localization

Sheema Rezaei (Carleton)

Settlement localization

Emily Wang (Carleton)

Settlement localization

Pegah Nikravan (Carleton)

Settlement localization

Parisa Sabathemmatatabadi (Carleton)

Settlement localization

Ali Ghaharbeighi (Carleton)

Settlement localization

Partow Mohammadi (independent scholar)

Settlement localization

Ayat Tadjalli (Carleton)

Settlement localization

Nima Kiani (independent scholar)

Settlement localization

Laura Salisbury (Carleton/GCRC)

Map production

Ronak Moradi (Razi-Kermanshah)

Bibliography

3.2 Incorporation of existing data sources

The initial phase of the current research involved the collection and assembling of existing data sources. First, we developed a background map of Kurdistan Province designed specifically for language mapping. Using open-access data (SRTM 2014), Amos Hayes, Robert Oikle and Laura Salisbury constructed a chromatically neutral relief background, with administrative borders as a guide for map users (NCC 2014), onto which language distribution and linguistic data can be projected.



Figure 1: Background map for Kordestan Province
(Map design: Robert Oikle, GCRC. Source: <http://iranatlas.net>)

Secondly, we brought together settlement-related geographic data (NCC 2016, Roostanet 2016) and open-access demographic data for all populated places of Kordestan from the 2011 census of Iran (ISC 2011), which was the most recent available census data at the time of research. However, because the geographic data has not been made publicly available in tabular format, members of the research team spent several hundred hours reconstructing georeferenced (GPS) coordinates for each settlement.

The ALI bibliography brings together a third set of existing information sources for language in Kordestan Province. This annotated bibliography, which includes all works that address language distribution or provide linguistic data from Kordestan, has been assembled and is under continuous expansion by Jaffer Sheyholislami and Ronak Moradi. This is a slow and challenging task because many sources, whether commercial publications or academic works such as theses, have little or no presence on the internet.

This is especially true for studies written in Kurdish and Persian; many of these items are only available from bookstores and universities within the language area. While this bibliography is important in providing a foundation for our own work on Kordestan, as well as comprehensive referencing of the data in the Atlas, it is also valuable in its own right as resource for scholars, since it is the most complete repository of language-related materials for Kordestan Province.

3.3 Collection of new data: Language distribution and local place names

Building on the existing sources incorporated into the Atlas, the current research has entailed the systematic collection of preliminary data for all of the some 1800 settlements (i.e. cities, towns and villages) of Kordestan Province. For each settlement, we considered two issues: language distribution, and local pronunciations of the place names. The basic research questions we asked in relation to language distribution were as follows:

1. *What languages, and what subvarieties of these languages, are spoken as a mother tongue in this settlement?*
2. *In the case that more than one variety is spoken in the settlement, what is the estimated proportion of mother tongue speakers of each variety?*

For the topic of local place names, we asked:

What is/are the local name(s) of this place, as pronounced locally?

Field research on language distribution and local place names was carried out over a 6-month period in 2015 by Masoud Mohammadirad, with additional time spent analyzing and verifying the data. Because of the logistical impossibility of visiting nearly two thousand settlements, research was carried out through a network of participants from across the province. The assembled data is based on sources of three types:

1. Local knowledge of the field researcher. Mohammadirad was born and grew up in the city of Qorveh, in the south-east corner of Kordestan Province. He also worked for five years in the neighbouring district of Deh Golān. This background has given Mohammadirad an in-depth understanding of patterns in the language situation there and elsewhere in the Province.

2. Teachers at local schools in each region. Teachers are well-placed to contribute local place names and to provide assessments of language distribution because their students come from many different villages, and because they are themselves highly mobile within the regions where they work. Most teachers across Kordestan Province come from within the province, and often work in areas near to their communities of origin, so they are already familiar with the languages they encounter as well as sociolinguistic tendencies for language use across the province. Conversely, the fact that teachers have been in most cases assigned to schools outside of their community of origin, along with their higher education, adds an element of wider perspective and scientific rigour that is beneficial to the research process.
3. Additional sources. Whenever Mohammadirad or the teachers did not have detailed knowledge of local place names or language distribution for a particular village or area, they contacted people from the area under investigation to verify their own hypotheses and to fill in gaps in their knowledge of the situation.

After Mohammadirad's fieldwork was completed, the authors verified the reliability of the results through a careful joint review of the data to identify and address points of variation in the results; comparison with maps and other studies outside of the present project (Hassanpour 1992; Haig & Öpengin 2014; Sheyholislami 2015, etc.) to assess how closely our results lined up with those of these other studies; and additional, direct contacts with speakers in numerous geographic locations to resolve areas of ambiguity in the data.

On a practical level, this component of the research process has positive consequences beyond the specific research questions which are being addressed. Importantly, researchers who carry out this initial phase of the Atlas work or Kordestan Province are well-prepared for subsequent work in language data collection; they have already become familiar with the regions they will be investigating and the languages spoken there, and they have established a network of potential hosts for fieldwork.

It is imperative to recognize that, for logistical reasons, most of the language distribution and local place name research has been carried out indirectly, as described in the preceding paragraphs. This study in no way purports to be a census, with a highly trained researcher or research team traveling to each settlement to collect language distribution and local place name

data from all individuals, or even a representative cross-section of individuals from each place. In this respect, it is subject to the limitations that come with any large, non-census data set.

However, we have observed that, simply by asking research questions for each settlement, a first systematic, detailed picture of the language situation has emerged for the province as a whole. Crucially, this research raises new questions about relationships and differences between language varieties, and provides direction for subsequent collection of the kind of linguistic data that will help to address these questions more thoroughly.

Importantly, the very fact of making the data publicly available in the Atlas means that our findings can be critiqued and refined. Through a rigorous data collection and editing process, the research team has made every effort to ensure the reliability of all the data that has been collected, and to provide a reference for each piece of data. Still, with so much data, there are certainly oversights and areas for improvement. Because of this, the Atlas has been designed, and is already capable to receive, moderate and reference feedback on each piece of data. In this way, Atlas users who are familiar with a specific local situation will be able to assist the research team in improving the accuracy of the data.

In the following sections, we present topically detailed discussion and results from our study of language distribution and local place names.

4 Local place names: Methodology, significance and patterns

The collection and transcription of local place names has constituted an integral part of the research on Kordestan Province. For this portion of the study, Mohammadirad prepared a reference list of settlements using the Persian place names in the 2011 census list (ISC 2011), and romanized them according to the transcription conventions developed and posted on the Atlas project website (<https://carleton.ca/iran/transcription/>). He then asked respondents with local knowledge of each settlement the following question (repeated from Section 3.3 above): *What is or are the local name(s) of this place, as pronounced locally?*

Mohammadirad, who is not only a speaker and writer of Kurdish but also a linguist with experience in phonetic and phonological analysis of the language, transcribed the answers to this question, for each place, using a phone-

mic transcription system available at the same web page.⁴ Each individual transcription has been double-checked for consistency by the Atlas editor. The Persian name, its romanized form, and the phonemic transcription of the local name, along with a reference to the source for the transcription, all appear on a page for each settlement which is reachable by clicking on the settlement in the Kordestan Province language distribution overview map (see Figure 2 in Section 5.2 below) or directly through an Atlas search.

Even though the additional step of collecting and transcribing local place names may seem peripheral to the enterprise of language mapping, we found that it has several indirect but important benefits to the process and eventual impact of the research.

First of all, it compels the researcher to locate individuals who are actually familiar with local place names, and this is a very specific, localized kind of data. Since people (whether researchers or speakers of the languages under investigation) tend to generalize tendencies about language distribution to whole areas without considering each settlement, this additional step ensures that the researcher will be in contact with people who have this very local knowledge of each settlement, before pursuing questions about language distribution.

Secondly, the featuring of local place names in the Atlas has the potential to strengthen the connection between the Atlas and its users, since people from a given settlement might be gratified at the public recognition of one local element of language and culture.

Thirdly, and closely tied to this, by enabling the production of maps with local names, the Atlas counterbalances the majority-language perspective inherent in all official maps of the region. In the end, it is the people living in a given settlement who use its name most frequently, and this element of local heritage deserves to be represented.

Finally, work on local names allows the researcher to become familiar with a diverse and representative (albeit limited) set of linguistic structures that are characteristic of each region within the province. In Atlas work on other

⁴The phonemic transcription system for local place names uses a minimum of complex phonetic symbols, since it is intended to be displayed on language maps and easily read by non-specialists. However, all phonemic distinctions are marked, and additional characters are introduced when necessary. In the case of Kordestan Province, phonemic symbols introduced from the wider field of Kurdish linguistics included ē, ɾ and ʃ. A subsequent critique of the research process by a workshop team in December 2016 at Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, highlighted the value of also including a phonetic transcription of each data item. However, this was not part of the research process for Kordestan Province, which was carried out during the previous year.

provinces of Iran (see Section 1 “Introduction” above), this experience has turned out to be valuable in preparing Atlas team members for selection of research sites for extended language data collection, and for the actual linguistic structures they will encounter when carrying out this subsequent step.

In terms of the actual local place name data, which is available for each settlement on the Atlas website, we observed three patterns regarding correspondences between local names and the official Persian labels in the 2011 census data (ISC 2011). In most cases, local place names are identical or correspond in a systematic way, whether phonologically or lexically, to the official Persian labels:

LOCAL NAME	OFFICIAL NAME
Bijār	Bijār
Kāni Dirēzh	Cheshmeh Derāz
Kawpēch	Kowpich
Ōghal	Owghal
Qurwa	Qorveh

In many other cases, there is still a clear resemblance, but the official label has been assigned with a similar – and often slightly longer – Persian term. Some of the differences can be attributed to the shortening of local names through a natural process of phonological reduction in the spoken language, but for other pairs of similar-sounding items the official label reflects a Persian folk etymology (that is, a semantic reinterpretation) of the local place name.

LOCAL NAME	OFFICIAL NAME
Bāyzāwā	Bāyzid Ābād
Jērāmīna	Jeyrān Mangeh
Kōsawmar	Kows Anbar
Mirasām	Mir Hesām
Sīna	Sanandaj

Finally, it is occasionally the case that a complete different official label has been applied to a given settlement, but the original name has been retained locally alongside or instead of the official label:

LOCAL NAME	OFFICIAL NAME
Biyakara	Hoseyn Ābād
Kharka	Bahārestān
Khöļina	Zafar Ābād
Māma Shā	Eslām Ābād
Say Ismāil	Hay'at Ābād

Although it is not the focus of the present study, even a cursory observation of this third set of place names reveals certain tendencies in the official naming and renaming of settlements, with a preference for labels that reflect the national language, culture, and official confession.

5 Language distribution and classification

In this section, which forms the core of the study, we investigate, analyze and describe patterns of language distribution and classification for Kordestan Province. After a presentation and discussion of these interconnected research questions, we provide an overview of language distribution of the province, and introduce a map which visualizes the results of our research. We then provide a detailed classification and discussion of varieties, addressing linguistic as well as sociolinguistic considerations. Extended discussion is devoted to the particularly complex status and internal classification of Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish. After highlighting outstanding issues and questions in classification, we outline future directions for a refined classification of the languages of Kordestan Province.

5.1 Research questions for language distribution: Focus and limitations

For the topic of language distribution, which is a central theme in the Atlas, we limited our investigation to the following two questions (repeated from Section 3.3 above): 1) *What languages, and what subvarieties of these languages,*

are spoken as a mother tongue in this settlement? 2) In the case that more than one variety is spoken in the settlement, what is the estimated proportion of mother tongue speakers of each variety?

As stated above, our objective in collecting these data has been to assemble a first coherent and detailed picture of language distribution for all of Kordestan Province. While this is a worthwhile initiative in itself, it is indispensable to further research toward the Atlas' central purpose of providing a systematic investigation of key linguistic structures in the region as a whole, including linguistic characteristics of each dialect, as well as similarities and differences among dialects. Examination of the language distribution data has helped us to optimize our selection of sites for subsequent in-depth language data collection (sociolinguistic context, lexicon, phonology, morphosyntax, texts) across the province using the ALI questionnaire (<http://carleton.ca/iran/questionnaires>).

Multilingual proficiency in Persian and other languages, and other major sociolinguistic factors such as language change, shift and endangerment, are also essential in understanding the language situation as a whole. However, such factors are better suited to community-specific sociolinguistic studies such as those featured in Sheyholislami & Sharifi (2016) and Shahidi (2008) and Anonby & Yousefian (2011). For this reason, further sociolinguistic topics are reserved for systematic inquiry in the research sites where in-depth language data collection will take place using the Atlas questionnaire.

5.2 An overview of language distribution in Kordestan Province

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Kordestan Province is often viewed as a linguistically homogeneous area, with Central Kurdish (or “Sōrāni”; but see Section 5.3 below for a discussion of this label) as the characteristic mother tongue for the province as a whole. While this depiction is legitimate in a very general sense, our comprehensive investigation of language distribution across the province highlights significant linguistic diversity of three types: the existence of several major language groupings; significant internal dialectal diversity in several of these languages; and important social factors correlated with language distribution.

The following map, which is the first systematic overview of language distribution in Kordestan Province – to the level of each settlement – summarizes the results of our research.

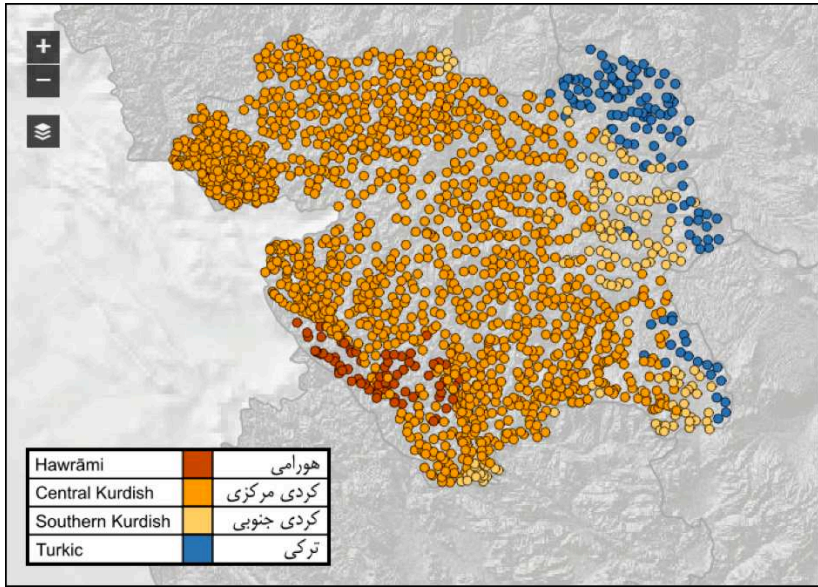


Figure 2: Overview of language distribution in Kordestan Province⁵
<http://iranatlas.net/module/language-distribution.kordestan>

As the map shows, the major language groupings across the province are as follows:

1. **Central Kurdish**, found across much of the province;
2. **Southern Kurdish**, found in pockets in several parts of the province: in the north-east and south-east corners of the province, in the regions of Bijār and Qorveh respectively; in Kāmyārān region, along the southern border with Kermanshah Province; and in a handful of villages near Saqqez in the north-west.
3. **Hawrāmi**, spoken in many settlements in the south-western part of the province, but also as a significant minority in the cities of Sanandaj and Marivān, and in the village of Qallā near Qorveh; and

⁵While the map printed here indicates only the language with the largest proportion of speakers in each settlement, the online map provides proportions for speakers for each language in settlements where more than one variety is spoken.

4. **Turkic**, spoken in the outer areas of Bijār and Qorveh districts in the east.

There are also significant **Persian**- and **Aramaic**-speaking minorities in the cities of the province (see discussion in Section 5.3 below).

The distribution of Southern Kurdish, Hawrāmi and Turkic is fascinating, because each of these groups covers a significant area of the map. As was the case for Mohammadirad, a linguist from Kordestan who learned much about the language situation in the province over course of his research (see Section 3.3 above), the extent and nature of linguistic diversity can be surprising and informative for scholars as well as inhabitants of the province.

5.3 Classification and description of language varieties

Although each component of the present research was accompanied by a unique set of challenges, the classification and labelling of language varieties in Kordestan Province turned out to be one of the more intricate tasks, and required an additional phase of research and analysis after all other components were completed. The development of a coherent picture of language classification – itself a multi-faceted and exceedingly complex enterprise – for a vast, poorly-documented geographic area, necessitated an approach that was both innovative and flexible. At the same time, our integration of new insights and incorporation of more specific research questions over the course of the study, as described in this section below, meant that the research process was not identical for all locations.

To arrive at an overarching taxonomy of all language varieties in the province, we looked first of all at how people perceive and describe each language variety (see Anonby et al. 2016), with attention to several kinds of labels (some of which can overlap):

- **autoglottonyms**: labels that speakers use to refer to their own language variety;
- **heteroglottonyms**: language variety labels used by people who are not speakers of a given variety – whether speakers of related varieties, speakers of other languages in the region, or people outside the region;
- **labels applied by linguists**, which, strictly speaking, are a further type of heteroglottonym;

- **assessments**, by individuals (representing any of the three points above) with knowledge of the topic, as to whether two language varieties are the same or different; and
- **non-linguistic labels** applied to language varieties, such as geographic, ethnic or religious terms.

For Kurdish (Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish together), Hawrami, Turkic, Aramaic and Persian, the designation of higher-level language groupings was straightforward, since speakers as well as scholars are easily able to distinguish each of these varieties from one another.⁶

On the other end of the question of classification, speakers of all the language varieties are typically comfortable referring to their specific language variety using the name of the exact settlement they come from.

Between these two ends of the spectrum, the labelling and classification of mid-level language varieties, which is the most valuable element in furthering what is known about the dialect situation in Kordestan Province, were harder to ascertain.⁷

In some cases, the different types of mid-level labels listed above correspond neatly, and in such cases we have chosen to accept these assessments, subject to further study on the linguistic structure of each variety, as a working hypothesis for their classification. In other cases, people are very con-

⁶The relationship between Hawrami on the one hand, versus Central and Southern Kurdish on the other, is multifaceted. There has been longstanding debate as to whether Hawrami is a Kurdish subvariety, closely related to Kurdish, or a historically distinct branch of Iranian, and the conclusions proposed by scholars (e.g., Soane 1921; Minorsky 1943; MacKenzie 1986, 1987, 2002; Kreyenbroek 1992; Leezenberg 1993; Hassanpour 1998; Haig & Öpengin 2014) differ according to whether social factors, synchronic structural similarities, or historical linguistic innovations are given precedence. Additional in-depth research, with careful attention to presuppositions about parameters for classification, is needed to clarify this question. In any case, this debate falls outside of the present study, since both Hawrami and Kurdish speakers consulted here consistently make primary reference refer to this variety as Hawrami or an equivalent label such as *māchō māchō* or *māchō zwān* (see the discussion on Hawrami in the later part of this section); this label therefore constitutes one of the higher-level language groupings for Kordestan Province.

⁷This situation is actually the opposite of what we observed in our dialectological work in Hormozgan Province (Anonby & Yousefian 2011; Mohebbi Bahmani et al. 2015; Anonby & Mohebbi Bahmani 2016; Nourzaei et al. 2015; Anonby 2016). There, mid-level language groupings (e.g., “Achomi”, Keshmi, Bandari of Bandar Abbas, Minabi, Rudoni, Koroshi, Marzi Gal Bashkardi, etc.) are clearly defined and generally agreed-upon by speakers and others, including scholars. Conversely, in most cases, the designation of a “language” label for these varieties (e.g., “Persian”, “Lārestāni”, “Bandari”, “Hormozgani”, “Balochi”, etc.), and the grouping of the varieties under these common labels, is problematic for speakers and scholars alike.

scious of a difference between varieties but do not have labels to distinguish them, and in such cases (which are clearly indicated), we have proposed labels for these groupings. Further, there are cases where linguists, and especially the field linguist Mohammadirad, have observed systematic structural differences between varieties, and this informs our proposal for how varieties can best be classified. Examples of each of these situations are provided in the ensuing discussion.

With these factors as a backdrop, the following subsections provide further discussion and detailed internal classifications of the language varieties of Kordestan Province. All language classifications are abstractions, and are necessarily based on a consideration of finite sets of linguistic and sociolinguistic factors. In many cases, even when all factors are adequately investigated and controlled, there is still limited consensus regarding any language classification (see Anonby et al. 2016 for further discussion).

In the end, we submit the classification developed here as working model that will facilitate refinement of scholarly understanding of the language situation in Kordestan Province, through dialogue and the collection of language data that speak directly to relationships among varieties.

5.3.1 *Defining Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish*

As observed in the literature (Haig & Öpengin 2014: 103; Sheyholislami 2015: 30) and confirmed by Mohammadirad during fieldwork for the present study, speakers of Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish consistently make primary reference to their language simply as *kurdi* ‘Kurdish’.

When consulted about what kind of Kurdish they speak, respondents generally refer first to a very local variety (Kurdish of a given village), or a mid-level variety such as “Ardalāni” or “Garūsi” (for other examples, see the internal classifications of Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish below). High-level groupings equivalent to Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish are rarely used as autoglotonyms.

However, and as reflected in the assessments of many scholars (e.g., Paul 1998; Fattah 2000; Korn 2003; Windfuhr 2009; Mohammadirad, field notes 2016), Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish are recognized as important high-level groupings by speakers. This fact emerged with speakers in the course field research: in response to the question, “Are there some main groups of Kurdish in Kordestan Province?”, respondents generally identified *kursāni* ‘Kordestani’ and *kirmāshāni* ‘Kermanshahi’ as two high-level groupings. Of course, this labelling is problematic since, as clearly demonstrated in

our study and elsewhere, neither variety is by any means limited to these respective provinces. There are also Kurdish-speaking groups at the periphery that view *kursāni* as referring only to the dialects in the centre of the province. In districts where both Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish are spoken, the labelling of the two groups was more nuanced and specific: in Kāmyārān district, for example, Central Kurdish is referred to simply as *kurdi*, but Southern Kurdish is known as *arā zwān* (“*arā*” language). This label refers to the frequently occurring Southern Kurdish morpheme *arā* ‘why, for’, which is conspicuously different from its Central Kurdish counterpart *bō*.

Among scholars, and especially those of Western origin (e.g., MacKenzie 1961–1962), “Sōrāni” has been used as a general term for Central Kurdish, in contradistinction to the term “Kurmanji” used to refer to Northern Kurdish. However, as will be evident from the discussion of Central Kurdish varieties below, the label “Sōrāni” is not typically used by Central Kurdish speakers of Kordestan Province to refer to Central Kurdish as a whole. Because of this (and along with considerations relevant to other parts of the language area), scholars are increasingly referring to this variety as Central Kurdish. In contrast, as the recognition of the Central Kurdish variety becomes more prominent in popular Kurdish discourse, MacKenzie’s original label of “Sōrāni” is increasingly used by speakers in parts of the Central Kurdish language area which did not formerly use this label (Hassanpour 2012; Sheyholislami 2012; Mohammadirad, field notes 2016).

5.3.2 *Internal classification of Central Kurdish*

Based on the results of our initial field research, we propose the classification of Central Kurdish in Kordestan Province into the following five subvarieties:

- **Sōrāni**, as defined in this study,⁸ is spoken in northern and western districts (Persian: *shahrestān*) of Kordestan Province: Saqqez, Bāneh, Marivān, and parts of Sarv ābād. The label for this subvariety, which is used by speakers, comes from the former principality of Sōrān (Hassanpour 1992; McDowall 2004), which is located in the north-eastern part of present-day Kurdistan Governorate in Iraq, close to the Iranian border. Even within Sōrāni, there are some geographically or socially

⁸While the term “Sōrāni” has been used in the literature to refer to all Central Kurdish subvarieties, speakers in Kordestan Province see it as a subset of Central Kurdish (see “Defining Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish” above).

defined dialect groupings (Tilakōyi, Sarshiwi, Fayzulābagi,⁹ etc.) that speakers use for their own variety, but we have been unable to observe or posit such groupings across all of the Sōrāni-speaking areas. A number of the city/district-inspired labels (Mariwāni, Bānayi, Saqezi, etc.) are used by Central Kurdish speakers from elsewhere in the province, but not by the speakers who are from the given area. Central Kurdish speakers in Divān Darreh district also use the label “Sōrāni” for their variety, but Mohammadirad has observed through fieldwork that the dialect spoken in Divān Darreh district appears to be transitional between Ardalāni and the Sōrāni dialects to the west, and that – subject to further study – it may be better classified with Ardalāni if structural linguistic considerations are given precedence.

- **Ardalāni** is centred in Sanandaj city (K. *sma*) and spoken throughout Sanandaj district. The name for this subvariety, which is used by speakers, comes from the former Ardalān Principality, which was the last principality to be dismantled by Ottoman and Persian empires (Hasanpour 1992). The subvariety is referred to as *smayi* ‘Sanandaji’ by people from elsewhere, but within the Ardalāni area, the application of the term *smayi* tends to be limited to the dialect of Sanandaj city, and its conservative form in particular. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Central Kurdish subvariety spoken in Divān Darreh district appears to be transitional between Ardalāni and the Sōrāni dialects to the west, and in fact may pattern more closely with Ardalāni in its structure.
- **Laylākhi** is spoken in Deh Golān district and the western side of Qorveh district. The name of this subvariety, which is used by speakers, was reflected in the name of the former district which included both current districts. Speakers also refer to Laylākhi as “Gōrāni” to distinguish it from other Central Kurdish varieties, but it is not related to the Gōrāni linguistic group of which Hawrāmi is a part (see Mahmoudveysi et al. 2012 for the geographic dispersion of this latter group). As is the case for varieties within Sōrāni, speakers point to internal divisions

⁹The first two varieties mentioned here (Tilakōyi and Sarshiwi) are geographically defined, and take their names from the main cities of the dialect area, but the Fayzulābagi variety has a social component as well: it is the “original” high-prestige Sōrāni variety spoken in and around the city of Saqqez, and is considered as different from the “new” Sōrāni that is increasingly found there.

within Laylākhi using geographic and social labels (Qurwai, Shēkh Es-māili, etc.), but according to Mohammadirad (field notes 2016), the linguistic basis of these divisions is difficult to establish and deserves further investigation.

- **Bijār Central Kurdish** is spoken by a minority of people in Bijār city, and in many villages in the western part of Bijār district. This label is not used by speakers, who simply refer to their language as *kurdi* ‘Kurdish’, in distinction to the Southern Kurdish varieties that dominate the district, which they refer to as *bijāri* or *garūsi* (see “Garūsi” under “Southern Kurdish” below).
- **Kāmyārān Central Kurdish** is spoken by a majority of people in Kāmyārān city and the district of Kāmyārān as a whole. This label is not used by speakers, who simply refer to their language as *kurdi* ‘Kurdish’, in distinction to the Southern Kurdish varieties spoken in the district and in Kermanshah Province to the south, which they refer to as *arā zwan* “‘why, for’ language’.

The classification of subvarieties of Central Kurdish, as summarized here, reveals a set of five more- or less-well-defined subvarieties that can serve as a useful starting point for further dialectological research. We expect significant variation within each of the five subvarieties and, as treated explicitly for Central Kurdish of Divān Darreh, there are almost certainly transitional areas between each of the subvarieties. The nature of intra- and inter-dialect variation can be investigated further when language data is collected from major dialect centres and transitional areas at the edges of each subvariety.

5.3.3 *Internal classification of Southern Kurdish*

Southern Kurdish varieties in Kordestan Province are easier to classify than Central Kurdish varieties for several reasons: they are geographically discrete, separated by Central Kurdish-speaking areas; for most of the varieties, there are clear labels that distinguish them from Central Kurdish; and speakers’ assessments of their own dialects match those of other groups. The four main Southern Kurdish subvarieties in the province are as follows:

- **Garūsi** is spoken in the city of Bijār, along with most villages in central and southern portions of Bijār district. This variety is named after the former principality of Garrus (Hassanpour 1992).

- **Chardāwri** (which Fattah 2000 refers to as Chahār Dawli) is spoken by a minority of the population in Qorveh city, and in most of the towns and villages to the south-east, up to the borders of Hamadan and Kermanshah Provinces. The name of this variety is derived from the Chardāvol district of Ilam Province, where speakers situate their origins. Along with this label, speakers also refer to their variety as *kulyāyi*, since it is similar to Kulyāyi varieties of Southern Kurdish in neighbouring areas across the border in Kermanshah Province.
- **Kāmyārān Southern Kurdish** is spoken by a significant minority of people in Kāmyārān city, and in almost twenty villages in the south-east corner of Kāmyārān district, toward the border with Kermanshah Province.
- **Kalhuri** is spoken in a handful of villages at the far north-east corner of Saqqez district, on the border with West Azerbaijan Province. The speakers of this subvariety come originally from the larger Kalhuri-speaking region that spans the border of Kermanshah and Ilam Provinces to the south.

There is also a handful of mixed Central and Southern Kurdish-speaking villages (or perhaps a transitional variety between them) found at the south end of Deh Golān district, on the border of Kermanshah Province. We do not yet have any detailed information about the language spoken in these villages, and until a fuller understanding of the dialect situation in the adjacent areas of Kermanshah Province becomes available (ongoing work is published in Fattahi et al. 2018), it will be difficult to provide an assessment or classification.

5.3.4 *Hawrami*

Hawrami (autoglottonym: *hōrāmī*), known as *māchō māchō* or *māchō zwān* in Kurdish,¹⁰ is represented by two major subvarieties in the south-west portion of Kordestan Province: **Takht Hawrami** in the south-west corner, and **Zhāwarū Hawrami**, toward the interior of the province. While both varieties are centred in Sarv Ābād district, there is a significant minority of Takht Hawrami speakers in Marivān city; and Zhāwarū Hawrami-speaking villages

¹⁰The label is an imitation of the Hawrami term *māchō* 'he/she said', a common structure that differs from its Central Kurdish counterparts *daḷē* or *ayzhē*, depending on the region (Mohammadirad, field notes 2016).

extend into the districts of Sanandaj and Kāmyārān. In south-east Kordestan, the Hawrami-speaking village of Qallā, now administratively part of Qorveh city, refers to its own variety as **Qalāyi**; the relation between this and other Hawrami varieties has yet to be studied.

5.3.5 *Turkic*

From our initial survey, there are three main subvarieties of Turkic in Kordestan Province:

- **Shāhsevan Turkic** is spoken in part of Bijār district. This variety is associated with the traditionally migratory Shāhsevan ethnic group (Tapper 2010), which extends to several other provinces of Iran.
- So-called “**Tāt**” **Turkic**, as it is referred to by its speakers, is spoken in other parts of Bijār district. Considering its label, it is possible that the people who speak this subvariety were originally speakers of the Northwestern Iranic language Tāti.
- **Ghūrva** (or Qorveh) **Turkic**, a dialect group known to its speakers simply as “Torki”, is spoken by a minority of people in the city of Qorveh, and in about twenty towns and villages on the eastern side of the district, up to and along the border with Hamadan Province. Speakers often refer to their language according to the individual clans they belong to (Notarki, Khodābandelu, Bāghluja, etc.); however, we have not observed any linguistic basis for this type of further subdivision of Ghūrva Turkic.

None of the Turkic varieties within Kordestan Province has ever been described in the literature, although the existence of Shāhsavān Turkic is at least known from other areas of Iran. Consequently, there is a great need for further study of this topic.

5.3.6 *Persian*

While Persian is not indigenous to Kordestan, it is spoken by immigrants to some of the larger cities of the province. In addition, as observed during Mohammadirad’s research for this study, Persian is emerging as a mother tongue in some of the areas of the province, as parents teach it to their children as a first language at home. Although this situation is observable in

Sanandaj and other larger cities of the province (as is the case in cities throughout Iran), the trend is most advanced in the eastern cities of Bijār and Qorveh, where among the urban Turkic communities it dates to the era before the Islamic Revolution. In contrast to the rest of the province, the cities of Bijār and Qorveh are predominantly Shi'a, and this is correlated with a favourable disposition toward Persian as a national language. Alongside existing positive attitudes, the cohabitation of Turkic and Kurdish and communities within the cities has promoted the use of Persian as a language of wider communication. Specifically, an increasing incidence of linguistically mixed marriages is a predictive factor in which homes children learn Persian as a mother tongue; however, an increasing number of parents in non-mixed Turkic and Kurdish homes are also teaching their children Persian (Mohammadirad, field notes 2016).

5.3.7 *Aramaic*

Before the Islamic Revolution, there were significant populations of Aramaic speakers (autoglottonyms: *ārāmāyā* 'Aramaic', *lishāna nōshan* 'our language') in Sanandaj as well as Bijār. As we learned during fieldwork among diaspora speakers of the language in New York City (Hoberman, Borjian and Anonby, field notes 2014), there is still a remnant of the former language communities in each city, with an even smaller subset of the communities – mostly older individuals – by whom Aramaic is still spoken. The Aramaic populations of these cities, along with speakers in the diaspora, share a single variety of North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (Hoberman, Borjian and Anonby, field notes 2014; Geoffrey Kahn, pers. comm. 2017; see also Rosenthal 1986 and Windfuhr 2006).

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have provided an account of the research process and results for Kordestan Province within the *Atlas of the Languages of Iran* research programme. In order to produce this Atlas module, a large team of scholars has carried out research of various types: collection and processing of existing geographic and demographic data for Kordestan Province; construction of a linguistic bibliography; compilation of local names for all settlements in the province; assessments of language and dialect distribution for each settlement; and publication of an open-access online map that embraces all of these elements, making them available to scholars and popular audiences.

The key result of this study is a first comprehensive picture of language distribution in Kordestan Province, with detail provided to the level of each settlement. This study shows, in contrast to prevalent conceptions, that Kordestan Province is linguistically diverse, with six important language groups represented: Central Kurdish, Southern Kurdish, Hawrami, Turkic, Persian and Aramaic. This diversity is also reflected by internal dialectal variety within the major groups. In the case of Central Kurdish and Southern Kurdish, we have provided a thorough initial classification of major subvarieties in the province, taking into consideration a range of linguistic and extralinguistic factors. We have also proposed initial classifications for the Hawrami and Turkic varieties spoken in the region, though many questions remain.

The results of the research presented in this article are not a final delimitation of all aspects of the linguistic situation. Rather, along with the accompanying open-access resources published in the Atlas, they are intended as a catalyst and guide to further inquiry. In one such application of the results, this study is enabling the next phase of Atlas research on Kordestan Province: the selection and implementation of language data collection for using the Atlas questionnaire. In this way, and in conjunction with other research initiatives carried out by other scholars in the field, our understanding of the language situation in Kordestan Province will be progressively refined.

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