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Bert Vaux - University of Cambridge

June 4 2022
Slides + Book: tinyurl.com/parksahayeren
Table of Contents

• Introduction

• Iranian Armenian

• Linguistic documentation of Iranian Armenian
  • What is linguistics
  • Describing the <a>
  • Comparing the <r>
  • Theorizing the past

• Discussion and future
Who we are

- Collaboration among
  Hossepin Dolutian
  Afsheen Sharifzadeh
  Bert Vaux
Explaining the title

- Project: *Linguistic documentation of Iranian Armenian*
- What is *Iranian Armenian*?
- What is *linguistics*?
- What did we *document*?
- What did we *learn*?
Table of Contents

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Armenians in Iran

- Armenians have been in Iran for 1000s of years (Hovhannisian, 2021)
- Some communities are smaller, ‘older’, and more well-described (Martirosyan, 2019, 85)
- Especially New Julfa (Vaux, in prep)
- But for more recent dialects in Iran, these are essentially un-described (Tehran)
In Tehran, there has been a large community for around 200 years.
The community grew out of migrations inside Iran.
By the 20th century, most Armenians in Iran are in Tehran.
A large community in the diaspora (Los Angeles).
Socially, Tehran Armenians are triglossic/trilingual
• Use Persian with the Persians
• Use Standard Eastern in writing + formal speech
• Use ‘vernacular’ dialect at home + informal speech
• We focus on this vernacular
In Tehran, the vernacular became socially prominent and noticeable by the 1910s (Աճառյան, 1940)

It has also been called Perso-Armenian or Persian Armenian

This is the dialect the Iranian Armenians of Los Angeles use
Armenians have been aware that this dialect exists for centuries. But there has not any significant documentation. Part of the reason is because people assume that “it’s just an accent” or “it’s just broken Armenian.”
The community is large but their language is under-described.

Out of respect to the community, we wanted to give a published record of their language.

We did fieldwork with Armenians in Tehran and Los Angeles over a long period of time.

1. Bert: 1990s + early 2000s
2. Afsheen: early 2010s
3. Hossep: early 2020s
What is linguistics?

- Linguistics: scientific study of language
- Two core types of linguistics

1. **Synchronic** linguistics: what a language is like *now*
2. **Diachronic** linguistics: how a language changes over time

- The two types often benefit from each other
- We focus more on synchronic linguistics
Linguists often ask the following research questions

1. Descriptive: what does the language do?
2. Comparative: how is this language different from other languages?
3. Theoretical: why is this language doing this?

We’ll go through examples of all these questions with Iranian Armenian
• What did we do?

- For space, we’ll focus just on some small aspects of Iranian Armenian
  1. Descriptive: ո <a> vowel
  2. Comparative: ի <r> consonant
  3. Theoretical: past tense of verbs
Describing `<a>`

- Iranian (IA) has almost the same vowels as Standard Eastern (SEA)
- A noticeable difference is for the `<a>` vowel
- `<X>`: transliteration
- `[X]`: pronunciation from International Phonetic Alphabet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transliterated</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td><code>&lt;baţak&gt;</code></td>
<td><code>βaţak</code> [bɑţak]</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><code>&lt;apaki&gt;</code></td>
<td><code>αpaki</code> [apaki]</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><code>&lt;bak&gt;</code></td>
<td><code>bαk</code> [bɑk]</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td><code>&lt;bażak&gt;</code></td>
<td><code>βażak</code> [bɔżak]</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><code>&lt;apaki&gt;</code></td>
<td><code>αpaki</code> [apaki]</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><code>&lt;bak&gt;</code></td>
<td><code>bαk</code> [bɔk]</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describing <a>

- The <a> vowel has wide-open unrounded lips /ɑ/ in SEA
- But small rounded lips /ɒ/ in IA

Standard Eastern Armenian <a>

Iranian Armenian <a>

2https://seeingspeech.ac.uk/ipa-charts/?chart=4
Describing <a>

- But notice how some <a> sounds are again pronounced differently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transliterated SEA</th>
<th>Transliterated IA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;arab&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;darak&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[arab] [æɻæb] Play</td>
<td>[darak] [dæɻæk] Play</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'Arab' ‘drawer’

- The <a> places the tongue more forward in some words /æ/
- This is like the English vowel in ‘cat’

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3 en.wiktionary.org/, https://github.com/jhdeov/iranian_armenian
• But why is Iranian Armenian different?
• Language contact!
• Persian has a rounded /ɒ/ and a front /æ/
• So the Tehranis just copied them :D
Comparing the `<r>`

- For `<r>`, the dialects are pretty different

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transliterated SEA</th>
<th>SEA կողմից իրականացվող /ɾ/ կերպը, իսկ ԻՐ-ի կողմից իրականացվող /ɻ/</th>
<th>SEA-ը tap /ɾ/, while IA is a retroflex /ɻ/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;ǰur&gt;</code></td>
<td>[dʒur] Play <code>water</code></td>
<td>[vəɾəʒ] Play <code>revenge</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>&lt;cʰoren&gt;</code></td>
<td>[tsʰoren] Play <code>wheat</code></td>
<td>[vəɻəɾəŋ] Play <code>revenge</code></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Comparing the <r>

- SEA-ի «ր»՝ լեզուն առջև կը զարնէ
- IA-ի «ր»՝ լեզուն ետեւ մարզանք կ՚ընէ

SEA <r>:
- the tongue taps forward /ɾ/

IA <r>:
- the tongue does gymnastics backwards /ɻ/
Comparing the `<r>`

- SEA `<r>` is relatively common across the globe
- But the IA sound is pretty rare
- Bravo to IA for being rare :)

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6https://phoible.org/
What is the past tense?

- We saw some sound differences, but there’s also major differences in word-formation.
- But let’s first talk about English.
- The past form of most verbs is just adding -ed.
- Some irregulars use other past forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive:</th>
<th>‘to walk’</th>
<th>‘to kick’</th>
<th>‘to eat’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past:</td>
<td>walk-ed</td>
<td>kick-ed</td>
<td>ate, not eat-ed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is the past tense?

- Common for languages to distinguish regular vs. irregular strategies
- SEA uses suffixes like `<c'>` or `<c'in>` for most regular verbs
- SEA uses suffixes like `<av>` or `<an>` for most irregular verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘to sing’</th>
<th>‘to read’</th>
<th>‘to eat’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infinitive:</strong></td>
<td>երգել</td>
<td>կարդալ</td>
<td>ուտել</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;ergel&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;kardal&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;utel&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[jerкʰel]</td>
<td>[kartʰal]</td>
<td>[utel]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past 3SG</strong></td>
<td>&lt;ergec'c&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;kardac'c&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;kerav&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[jerкʰe-tsʰ]</td>
<td>[kartʰa-tsʰ]</td>
<td>[ker-av]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past 3PL</strong></td>
<td>&lt;ergec'c'in&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;kardac'c'in&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;keran&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[jerкʰe-tsʰin]</td>
<td>[kartʰa-tsʰin]</td>
<td>[ker-an]</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;ergel&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;kardal&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;utel&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[jeɻkʰel]</td>
<td>[kɒɻtʰɒl]</td>
<td>[utel]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past 3SG</td>
<td>&lt;ergav&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;kardacʰ&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;kerav&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[jeɻkʰ-ɒv]</td>
<td>[kɒɻtʰ-ʃtʰ]</td>
<td>[keɻ-ɒv]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past 3PL</td>
<td>&lt;ergan&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;kardacʰin&gt;</td>
<td>&lt;keran&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[jeɻkʰ-ɒn]</td>
<td>[kɒɻtʰ-ʃtʰin]</td>
<td>[keɻ-ɒn]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But IA likes using <av> or <an> for most regulars instead of ‘to sing’ ‘to read’ ‘to eat’.
Why does IA use the <av> pattern so much?

Diachronically, people over-applied the rules from irregulars <kerav> [keɾ-av] to regulars <ergav> [jeɾkʰ-av]
**Theorizing on the past**

- From Ղազարյան (1982)’s frequency dictionary
- Very few irregular verbs exist, but they are used a lot in corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type frequency</th>
<th>Token frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of verbs</td>
<td>How often used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any verb</td>
<td>416,094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like երգել [jerkʰel]</td>
<td>286,164 (∼68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like ուտել [utel]</td>
<td>65,964 (∼15%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Goal of linguistics

- We went through some areas of differences, but what’s the point?
- The ultimate goal of any linguistic work is to know the ‘grammar’ of the language
- Grammar: the rules of how a language works
GRAMMARS IN LINGUISTICS

• Different types of grammars:

1. Mental grammar: the rules that the speaker knows
2. Teaching grammar: rules that we use to teach the language
3. Descriptive grammar: written record of the mental grammar

• Տարբեր տեսակ քերականութեան՝

1. Մտաւոր քերականութիւն՝ օրէնքները որ խօսող գիտէ
2. Ուսուցչական քերականութիւն՝ օրէնքները որ կը գործածենք որ լեզուն սորվեցնէք
3. Նկարագարկան քերականութիւն՝ մտաւոր քերականութեան արձանագրում մը
**Why describe?**

- A descriptive grammar tries to record as much objective information about a language.
- Descriptive grammars are used to help:
  1. Create teaching grammars
  2. Create language software
  3. Validate a language
  4. Preserve the language’s memory

→ make the language accessible to international audience of language scientists
Armenian has two major descriptive grammars:

1. Adjarian’s Liakatar series on mainly SEA
2. Dum-Tragut’s grammar on SEA

+ dozens of small grammars on different dialects

Grammars can range from 20 pages to 1000’s of pages.
We wrote a grammar :D – still in review

tinyurl.com/parksahaybook

All thanks to our consultants from Tehran + Los Angeles <3

- Karine Megerdoomian
- Nicole Khachikian
- Vartan Haghverdi
- Hannah Cox
- And many more :D
References


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Ղազարյան, Բաբկեն Կիրակոսի. 1982. Ժամանակակի հայոց լեզվի հաճախականության բառարան: Մոտավորապես 36200 բառ [Frequency dictionary of modern armenian: Approximately 36200 words].