



Lexical Similarities of English and Gilaki Languages

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ABSTRACT

Language is the means of communication among people. Gilaki language is an ancient and living Caspian language, and a member of the northwestern Iranian language branch, spoken in Iran's Gilan province. Gilaki is one of the branches of Pahlavi Ashkani language i.e. Parti, which is spoken in the north of Iran and the south parts of the Caspian Sea. Gilaki language and English language are included in the Indo-European branch of languages in language classifications. In this paper similar vocabularies in Gilaki and English languages are investigated. Among found vocabularies, some are completely similar both in terms of phonetic and semantic; some are semantically similar but phonetically different and some are phonetically similar but semantically different. And finally some words have slight differences both phonetically and semantically.

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Introduction

Language is the most important aspect in the life of all beings. We use language to express inner thoughts and emotions, make sense of complex and abstract thought, to learn to communicate with others, to fulfill our wants and needs, as well as to establish rules and maintain our culture [1].

We simply don't know how language originated. We suspect that some type of spoken language must have developed between 100,000 and 50,000 years ago, well before written language (about 5,000 years ago) [2].

The origins of human language will perhaps remain forever obscure. By contrast the origin of individual languages has been the subject of very precise study over the past two centuries. There are about 5000 languages spoken in the world today (a third of them in Africa), but scholars group them together into relatively few families - probably less than twenty. Languages are linked to each other by shared words or sounds or grammatical constructions [3].

The most widespread group of languages today is the Indo-European, spoken by half the world's population. This entire group, ranging from Hindi and Persian to Norwegian and English, is believed to descend from the language of a tribe of nomads roaming the plains of eastern Europe and western Asia (in modern terms centering on the Ukraine) as recently as about 3000 BC [3].

From about 2000 BC people speaking Indo-European languages begin to spread through Europe, eventually reaching the Atlantic coast and the northern shores of the Mediterranean. They also penetrate far into Asia - occupying the Iranian plateau [3].

Gilan is one of the northern provinces of Iran. It is located in the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. Without any exaggeration, Gilan is one of the oldest habitat of Iran [4]. In Avesta it is mentioned as Varna. Greece calls this land Kadousian [5]. The language of people of Gilan is Gilaki. Gilaki language belongs to the western group of Iranian languages. It is one of the branches of Pahlavi Ashkani language i.e. Parti. Gilaki

language and English language belongs to the Indo-European family of languages [6]. Therefore due to the similar historical roots with English language, to see the common words in terms of pronunciation and meaning should not be surprising.

The present study has attempted to identify similar lexicon between two languages - Gilaki and English languages. Lexical similarity is a measure of the degree to which the word sets of two given languages are similar. A lexical similarity of 1 (or 100%) would mean a total overlap between vocabularies, whereas 0 means there are no common words.

There are different ways to define the lexical similarity and the results vary accordingly. For example, Ethnologue's method of calculation consists in comparing a standardized set of wordlists and counting those forms that show similarity in both form and meaning. Using such a method, English was evaluated to have a lexical similarity of 60% with German and 27% with French.

Lexical similarity can be used to evaluate the degree of genetic relationship between two languages. Percentages higher than 85% usually indicate that the two languages being compared are likely to be related dialects [7].

The lexical similarity is only one indication of the mutual intelligibility of the two languages, since the latter also depends on the degree of phonetical, morphological, and syntactical similarity. It is worth noting that the variations due to differing wordlists weigh on this. For example, lexical similarity between French and English is considerable in lexical fields relating to culture, whereas their similarity is smaller as far as basic (function) words are concerned. Unlike mutual intelligibility, lexical similarity can only be symmetrical.

The importance of this paper is to show the common roots between two languages that are geographically far apart. Amongst found words, some are exactly the same with English words in terms of phonetic and semantic (table 1). Some words have common meaning and application but a little phonetic changes (table 2). And some words have similar phonetic but a

little semantic changes (table 3). And finally some words are both semantically and phonetically different but these changes are not significant (table4).

Background linguistics research about Gilaki language

Around 1830, Alexander Chodzko[8] - a Russian expert on Iran- studied Caspian dialects during the eleven years staying in Iran.

Berezine [9] is an Iranologist that studied Caspian dialects. B. Dorn [10] – a German expert on Iran- in the years of 1860 to 1861, conducted a research in the northern provinces of Iran about the scientific study of Caspian dialects.

Dorn's works were later used by Wilhem Geiger – a German Iranologist – in his book called “Grundriss der iranischen philologie” [11].

Melgunov [12], a Russian expert, published a book about Gilaki structures.

Rabino [13], a French expert, with using his political position in Iran, between 1906 and 1912, gathered valuable resources about Gilan and its language.

In 1930, a Danish expert on Iran, Christensen [14], published a very precious book about the grammatical structure of the Gilaki language.

Zavyalova [15], published his study on the phonetics of Gilaki language in 1955 in Leningrad.

Several Russian scientists: Rastargoueva, V. S., Kerimova, A. A., Mohamadzadeh, A. K., Pirejko, L. A., Edelmann, D. A in 1971 published “Gilyanskij yazyk” book in Moscow consisting a set of scientific research about Gilaki language [16]. After publishing that book, three of these scientists: Rastargoueva, V. S., Kerimova, A. A., Mohamadzadeh, and A.K., published a Gilaki- Russian dictionary in 1980 [17].

Methodology

Comparative studies in linguistics have a long history. Two languages – possibly more- can be compared to determine the differences and similarities between them [18]. Common ground of English with other languages can be observed in different layers such as vocabulary, structure, and context [19]. The first and the most superficial layer of common ground of languages is the level of vocabulary.

The theoretical framework of this research is the Lado's pattern for comparison of vocabularies across languages. Lado [20] distinguishes seven patterns including: 1.cognates, 2.false/deceptive cognates, 3.words similar in meaning but different in form, 4.words that have strange meaning, 5.new form types or idioms, 6. Words that have different connotations in two languages, 7.geographically- restricted words. This research focuses on the first and the second pattern: cognates and false/deceptive cognates. Ziahosseiny [21] defines cognates as: a number of words having reasonably similar pronunciation (and/or spelling) and meaning in the compared languages. Some of these words are borrowing and others can be traced back to the same etymological source. He [ibid] also defines false/deceptive cognates as: words which are similar in form, but may be only partially similar in meaning or may have quite different meaning.

The operational framework of this paper is based on the field research in Gilan. Data gathered from different cities and places of Gilan province with the help of many Gilak students of the northern universities of Iran (Islamic Azad University of Roudsar and Amlash, and Islamic Azad university of Lahijan) and with speaking with many native speakers of this land.

Discussion

Table 1. similar words in terms of phonetic and semantic

Vocabulary	Pronunciation in English [22]	Pronunciation in Gilaki [23]
Boot	/bu:t/	/bu:t/
Chair	/tʃeər/	/tʃeər/
Dull	/dʌl/	/dʌl/
Fanatic	/fə'nætɪk/	/fə'nætɪk/
Finish	/fɪnɪʃ/	/fɪnɪʃ/
Gill	/dʒɪl/	/dʒɪl/
Ginger	/dʒɪndʒər/	/dʒɪndʒər/
Lass	/læs/	/læs/
Leaf	/li:f/	/li:f/
Lot	/lɑ:t/	/lɑ:t/
Mini	/mɪni/	/mɪni/
Murmur	/mɜ:rmə(r)/	/mɜ:rmə(r)/
Seal	/si:l/	/si:l/

Table 2. Words with a common meaning and application but slight phonetic differences

Vocabulary	Pronunciation in English	Pronunciation in Gilaki
Rice	/raɪs/	/braɪs/
Cement	/sɪment/	/sæmənt/
Cow	/kau/	/gau/
Chicken	/tʃɪkɪn/	/tʃɪmke/
Clap	/klæp/	/kela/
Damage	/dæmɪdʒ/	/dæmɪdʒ/
Dark	/dɑ:rk/	/dærk/
Daughter	/dɔ:tə(r)/	/detər/
Galoshes	/gə'lə:ʃɪz/	/gə:lɔ:ʃ/
Gauche	/gəʊʃ/	/gəʃ/
Gloom	/glu:m/	/klum/
Groan	/grəʊn/	/gure/
Gradual	/grædʒʊəl/	/græʃ/
Gar	/dʒæ(r)/	/dʒæ(r)/
Here	/hɪə(r)/	/here/
Lagoon	/lə'ɡu:n/	/lə'gən/
Lame	/leɪm/	/ləm/
Leg	/leg/	/ləg/
Lechery	/letʃə(r)/	/lətʃə(r)/
Poly	/pəli/	/pela/
Right	/raɪt/	/rædʒ/
Shine set	/ʃaɪn set/	/ʃɪnse/
Verge	/vɜ:rdʒ/	/værdʒe/
wind	/wɪnd/	/wɪn/
Wish	/wɪʃ/	/wɪstæm/

Table 3. Words with a similar phonetic but slight semantic differences

vocabulary	Pronunciation in English	Pronunciation in Gilaki	Meaning in Gilaki [24]& [25]
Coach	/kəʊtʃ/	/kəʊtʃ/	help
Neck	/nek/	/nek/	chin
Sally	/səli/	/səli/	to fish
Tiff	/tɪf/	/tɪf/	thorn
Till	/tɪl/	/tɪl/	mud
Whale	/weɪl/	/weɪl/	large

Table 4. Words with both phonetic and semantic differences

vocabulary	Pronunciation in English	Pronunciation in Gilaki	Meaning in Gilaki [23]& [24]
Across	/əkrəs/	/əkrəz/	tall
Hand	/hænd/	/hand/	yardstick
Navy	/neɪv/	/nav/	a wooden road in a river
Sun	/sʌn/	/su/	light

As it can be seen in table 1, these words are both phonetically and semantically similar in two languages.

In table 2, there are some of Gilaki words that have changed slightly in terms of phonetic but have common meaning and application. The words mentioned in these two tables belongs to the first pattern of Lado's category: cognates. Because these words have reasonably similar pronunciation and meaning in the compared languages i.e. English language and Gilaki language. Some of these similarities can be due to borrowing and others can be traced back to the same etymological source. But according to the geographical location, Gilan was less affected by other societies and Gilaki language could greatly stay unchanged. Therefore the main reason for this similarities can be attributed to the common roots.

The words mentioned in table 3, have similar phonetics but different meanings. These words belong to the second pattern of Lado's category: false/deceptive cognates. Because these words are similar in form but are only partially similar in meaning. And finally the words are mentioned in table 4 have both phonetic and semantic changes.

As it is clear, there are many similar vocabularies between two languages. Lexical similarity can be used to evaluate the degree of genetic relationship between two languages. There are different ways to measure the degree to which the two given languages are similar e.g. mass comparison or Ethnologue's method. These paper tried to find the common words in two languages and does not determine the level of their genetic relatedness.

Conclusion

The attention of linguists to one of the most basic commons of human beings -language- has provided valuable results to international community. Common origin of many languages is a true evidence for being common of many other human factors. Finding the roots and clarifying them by linguists can provide us with some hidden layers of facts in the past. This research reveals that Gilaki language contains many lexical similarities with English language.

Lexical similarity among languages are not coincidental that can be ignored. It can be used to evaluate the degree of genetic

relationship between two languages. Additional research is needed to determine the level of genetic relatedness between Gilaki and English languages.

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