

Unstable morphology: Bashkardi in context

The verbal morphology of Bashkardi (Bš), a group of Iranian dialects spoken in Southern Iran inland of the Strait of Hormuz, seems quite clear at first sight, but rather unclear at a second glance. Moreover, it appears to be in a state of change that may be motivated by internal factors as well as by influence from Persian. This paper will try to shed some light on the issue. The data comes from recordings made in Iran by Ilya GERSHEVITCH in 1956.

Bashkardi is said to have a present tense employing a prefix (1a-b), parallel to Persian,¹ where the former aspectual function of the prefix is still seen in the past tense (1c-d).

1a) Bš (South) ¹	<i>a-ǰü-t</i>			
	IPFV-eat.PRS-1SG			
1b) Persian	<i>mī-x^wor-am</i>	1c) <i>mī-x^word-am</i>	1d) <i>x^word-am</i>	
	IPFV-eat.PRS-1SG	IPFV-eat.PST-1SG	eat.PST-1SG	
	'I eat'	'I was eating'	'I ate'	

One might thus assume that Bashkardi *a-* was likewise grammaticalised from a prefix / particle with imperfective meaning. It would then come as no surprise that Bashkardi is also said to have a “new continuous present tense formed from the infinitive”.¹ The prefix is *a-* again for North Bš, but *be-* for South Bš (2a-b). This has a parallel in the present tense of Caucasian Tat, with prefix in Muslim varieties and without it in Jewish Tat (2c-d).

2a) Bš (North)	<i>a-kerd-en</i>	= <i>om</i>		
2b) Bš (South)	<i>be-kert(-en)</i>	= <i>īn</i>		
	IPFV-do.PST(-INF)	=COP1SG		
	'I am doing'			
2c) Caucasian Tat (Muslim)	<i>ba-bāftan</i>	= <i>üm</i>	2d) <i>soxden</i>	= <i>um</i>
	IPFV-weave.INF	=COP1SG	(Jewish) do.INF	=COP1SG
	'I weave' ²		'I do' ³	

However, the supposed “continuous form” is actually very rare in the data, and only appears in contexts where the focus is on the event going on in this moment (3); it is thus better interpreted as progressive.

3) Bš (North)	<i>dega</i>	<i>hamâ</i>	<i>morg</i>	<i>nešt=e</i>	<i>sar</i>	<i>gandom,</i>	<i>gandom</i>	<i>a-xwarden=ī.</i>
	again	DEM	bird	sit.PT-COP3SG	on	wheat	wheat	IPFV-eat.PST-INF
								=PC3SG

‘[The boy sees:] Again that bird sits on the wheat, it is eating the wheat.’

Moreover, the alleged present tense in (1a) also is also used for future, in conditionals and in contexts that mirror the Persian subjunctive (4). *a-* thus displays a range of functions parallel to those of the verbal clitic *a* in Balochi dialects. Besides, the prefix *be-* (marker of the subjunctive and imperative in Persian) is also found in Bashkardi.

4a) Bš (North)	<i>be-yâr-ie</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>gwar=e</i>	<i>hamie</i>	<i>kabâb-ôn</i>	<i>a-xwar-om</i>
	SBJV-bring.PR-2PL	SUB	side=EZ	DEM	meat-PL	IPFV-eat.PRS-1SG
4b) Persian (constructed)	<i>bīy-āvar-īd</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>bâ</i>	<i>īn</i>	<i>kabâb</i>	<i>be-x^wor-am</i>
	SBJV-bring.PR-2PL	SUB	with	DEM	meat	SBJ-eat.PRS-1SG

‘Bring [the bread] so that I might eat it with the meat.’

Unprefixed forms (not mentioned in the literature) appear to occur in the same uses as those with *a-*.

The aim of this paper thus is to study the use of the various formations in Bashkardi, looking also at their links to parallel formations in closely related languages. I will argue that Gershevitch’s recordings show a verbal system in process of adjusting inherited formations as well as forms developed within areal influences to the verbal system of Persian, a process that appears to have come to its completion within the last 60 years.

¹ SKJÆRVØ, Prods O. 1989: “Bashkardi.” In: *Encyclopædia Iranica* 3, pp. 846-850: p. 846, 848.

² LECOQ, Pierre 1989: “Les dialectes caspiens et les dialectes du nord-ouest de l’Iran.” In: Rüdiger Schmitt (ed.): *Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*. Wiesbaden, pp. 296-312: p. 298.

³ AUTHIER, Gilles 2012: *Le judéo-tat (Langue iranienne des Juifs du Caucase de l’Est)*. Wiesbaden: p. 192.