An Analytical Study of Morphological Features and Considerations of Iranian Endangered Language (Case Study of Nominal System in Lari)

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Abstract—The present study, conducted in a descriptive-contrastive framework, aims to examine the specific characteristics of nominal system in Lari as a definitely endangered language by the UNESCO. Lari is spoken in Larestan in Fars Province and Hormozgan Province and some other Arabian countries like United Arab Emirates and Oman. Data were gathered through field materials and transcribed in IPA. Results showed that Lari used specific markers for different categories of nouns; for example, definite nouns employed /ʊ/ or /kæ/ (e.g., /zenekæ/ [the woman] while indefinite nouns utilized /i/ or /e/ (e.g., zeneki [a woman]). In addition, plurality, derivation and inflections included a wide range of affixes in Lari. It was concluded that Lari possesses a unique system of nouns which are influenced by structures, tense, affixes and etc.

Keywords—Lari language, nominal system, Persian, morphology.

I. INTRODUCTION

DIVIDED as a 'definitely endangered language' by the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, Lari is of the 14 Iranian Endangered Languages which are to be preserved through research and analysis, raising awareness, supporting projects and most importantly disseminating information such as books and articles. 'Education through mother tongue', furthermore, is one of the UNESCO's five programs in addressing particular aspects of language; consequently, it seems of high significance to provide the teachers with descriptive materials of endangered languages (e.g., Lari) in order to develop an appropriate educational syllabus design.

A. The necessity to save language

Languages are of high significance in preserving cultural heritage and social activities. There is a growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development, in ensuring cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue but also in

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strengthening co-operation and attaining quality education for all, in building inclusive knowledge societies and preserving cultural heritage and in mobilizing political will for applying the benefits of science and technology to sustainable development [1].

On the other hand, languages are increasingly under threat due to globalization processes and their fading will lead to the demise of world's rich tapestry of cultural diversity. More than 50 per cent of the approximately 7000 language spoken in the world are likely to die out within a few generations and 96 % of these languages are spoken by a mere 4 percent of the world's population [1].

As UNESCO has proposed, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, promotion of education of education and development of knowledge societies are central but they are not possible without broad and international commitment to promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity including the prevention of endangered languages.

International mother language day was proclaimed by UNESCO General Conference in November 1999 which is celebrated yearly on 21st February. It is to be noted that UNESCO work on language and multilingualism takes many forms, one of which is 'education' along with promoting inclusion and quality learning by supporting bi- and multilingual education, especially the use of mother tongue, at all levels and formal and informal settings with special attention to teacher training, literacy provision and health education.

Also, UNESCO is working to establish policies and practices that promote three principles set forth in its position paper on "Education in a Multilingual World". UNESCO supports 'mother-tongue instruction' as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers. The second one is 'bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education' as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse society. The third solution is emphasizing 'language as an essential component of inter-cultural education' in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

Furthermore, UNESCO promotes cultural diversity, dialogue and exchange and safe guarding of endangered languages and oral traditions as a means of protecting intangible heritage. In the case of 'definitely endangered language' the local language is no longer learned as the mother tongue or taught in the home and also the youngest speakers are of the parental generation. Therefore, this research aims at describing the nominal system in Lari as an endangered language. Doing so, it can enhance knowledge (especially syntactical and morphological knowledge) of Lari speakers and bridging the gap between parents and children by teaching grammar and words of Lari to local speakers[1].

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Larestan (520 32′E, 270 40′N) is located at the Southeastern part of Fars province in Iran. It's bound to Fars province from the north, to Hormozgan province from the south, to Kerman province from the east, and to Bushehr province from the west [2]. In this township there are nine districts (including Avaz, Khonj, Gerash, Fishvar, Ahel, etc.), the common language of which is Lari [3]. Form an etymological view, 'Lar' is derived from 'Lad' meaning 'the origin and the basis of everything'. Lari is of the SW branch of Middle Iranian languages [namely, Pahlavi in the Middle period of Persian Language Evolution) and consists of nine dialects, the most difference of which is in pronunciation [4].

Being a branch of Pahlavi language, Lari has so many similarities with Pahlavi, the mother language. For example we can mention the ergative structure existing in Lari. It means the difference between the conjugation of transitive and intransitive verbs. The speech community of this language include Fars province, Hormozgan Province and some of Arabic-speaking countries like United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman [5]. A few authors have written some books about this language, among which Oskarman (1909), Ramaskowitch (1945), Veladimir Minorski (1980) and Malčanova (1982) are noticeable. One of the most important researchers of this area is Koji Kamioka, Japanese Professor who wrote 'Comparative Basic Vocabulary of Khonji and Lari' in Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa in 1997. Furthermore, some Iranian researches like Vosughui (2005), Eghtedari (2005) have done precious researches about Lari in various areas [6]but the most important of these researches is carried out by Lotfali Khonji (2009) who has written the book titled 'Comprehensive study of Larestani language and Khonji dialect' which is based on linguistic features of Lari [5].

III. METHOD

This research, with the aim of describing Lari nominal system in the framework of a descriptive approach is going to take untouched area of this endangered language into consideration. Thus, the information gathered will be analyzed through descriptive method (descriptive linguistics).

The primary source of data for the project will be Lari field materials collected by researcher during two years research period in Lari-speaking Districts during 2011-2013. The materials include: a) more than 200 handwritten pages of Lari language texts, which have been transcribed using IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) and checked with native speakers while in the field, b) cassette tape recordings of most of the texts, c) grammatical notes on various linguistic factors like nouns, verbs, adjectives, and d) other handwritten books which have been copied and noted via accessing native speakers. This research is going to be conducted in analytical-descriptive framework.

Gleason (1961) states that contrastive approach in grammar writing focuses mainly on the construction patterns of language in comparison. It's useful in developing and designing materials of second language learning. The difficulties of statements of a language (Target language) will be revealed in such grammar and the teacher can select the best strategy to meet and eradicate these problems. Descriptive method of writing grammar on which the contrastive grammar is based is bringing adequate descriptions of the two languages contrasted. These descriptions must each be in terms proper to the languages being described. It's a kind of system, in fact, recording the structural patterns discernible with corpus on which it is based and therefore assumed to have some features of the language as following:

- It doesn't evaluate patterns in terms of any non-linguistic factors.
- Not all patterns or continuations of patterns used have the same social significance [7].

Chelliah & de Reuse (2011) describe: "linguistic fieldwork as the investigation of the structure of a language through the collection of primary language data gathered through interaction with native-speaking consultants. Descriptive linguistic fieldwork is:

- Data collection for the purpose of the documentation and description of a language
- Data collection through interaction with speakers
- Data collection in situations where speakers are expected to use the language [8].

The data gathered here (the method of collecting data would be explained in the next section) are divided and analyzed through tables and exact descriptions. Also, all the words, phrases and sentences would be transcribed in IPA and equivalents will be given in English.

IV. DISCUSSION

It is tried to classify and make a subtle division of morphological aspects of Lari language based on descriptive linguistics. Regarding the fact that the differences between Lari and Persian are seen in many categories, the researches tried to divide the nominal system in Lari through tables in addition to the description provided. Here, the nominal system of Lari is introduced in relevant categories and the additional information would be represented.

A. Definite nouns vs. indefinite nouns

In Lari, definite nouns are made by adding /ʊ/ or /kæ/ at the end of the words, e.g., /kæmutære ʧʊ/ [the dove] or /mærdækæ/ [the man]. However, the indefinite nouns are made as added /i/ or /e/. For example, /doti/ [a girl] or /leʧe/ [a lizard]. Table 1 shows the details.

B. Singular nouns vs. plural nouns

Singular nouns in Lari have no special inflection but when they are pluralized, the specific morphemes are added to them. To make a singular noun into plural, morphemes of /yâ/ or /iyâ/ are employed. For instance, / æʤmæyâ/ [T-shirts] and /ʃoviyâ/ [nights], are words in which pluralization are made though inflections. Table 1 shows more instances.

C. Simple nouns vs. complex nouns

Simple nouns are made of just one morpheme In Lari [like /pa/ (the foot)] but complex nouns are made through the combination of verbal or nominal units. For example, /gælæbu/ (shepherd) = /gælæ/ (the flock) + /bu/ (the responsible); in other example, /genâgærî/ (crazy) = /genâ/ (in a crazy manner) + /gærî/ (tendency). Also, as verbal system in Lari possesses a unique conjugational system [9](Mirdehghan & Ourang, 2013), complex nouns made with verbal units are very generative in this language; we can point to /næʧʧi/ (nail clippers) = /næʧ/ (nail) + /ʧi/ (to cut) or /ræfiɣbâzi/ (cronyism) = /ræfiɣ/ (friend) + /bâzi/ (play). Other instances and the rules are represented in table 1.

D. Derivatives vs. simple

As said before, simple nouns are made of just one morpheme in Lari; however, derivatives are made via adding derivational morphemes to the noun or verbs. Lari utilizes its own morphological system in regard to the place and function of derivational morphemes; for example, /ʧu:b/ + /i/ = /ʧu:bi/ (made of wood) or /kɑʊ/ (straw) + /du:/ = /kɑʊdu:/ (hayloft). Regarding the researches on this area [10], it can be said that Lari employs different kinds (with an open class) of derivational morphemes compared to other Iranian languages like Hawrami [11]. In short, Lari uses a unique feature of morphological system in applying derivational morphemes [12]. Table 1 has more.

E. Proper nouns vs. common nouns

In Lari, proper nouns are mostly used to indicate the special properties of usual objects in agriculture (like the names of palms trees, dates, wheat, etc.), and places; for example, /kælpok/ (a sort of lizard), or /ʃâxoni/ (the name of a specific palm tree) or /meræk/ (a monumental place in Lar). In contrast, common nouns referring to a place or events are generic and not specific; for example, /ʤoti/ (the shoes) is an example of a common noun in Lari. Other examples can be found in Table 1.

F. Concrete nouns vs. abstract nouns

Lari has no specific inflection or derivation to show the concrete or abstract nouns but it semantically divides them. In Lari, like other languages, those referring to people, animals and places and objects are included in the category of concrete names. For example, /dæri:ʧæ/ (the window) or /dokû/ (the shopping centre). In contrast, abstract nouns in Lari are related to names of events, ideas, quality and states, e.g. /su:m/ (coldness). Table one shows more.

G. Diminutives

As field data showed, In Lari, diminutives which described as a word form or suffix indicating the smallness are very usual in conversations. These frequently applicable nouns are made through adding morphemes of /a/, /o/, /e/ and /u/ at the end of the nouns; for example, /bæinu:/ (shrinking form for the bride) and /posækæ/ (shrinking form for the boy) are two diminutives in Lari. Other examples are represented in table one.

H. Onomatopoeia

Words like /kæp kæp/ (splash) and /forkæ/ (slurp) are examples of onomatopoeia in Lari. These sounds in Lari are nature-based and a bit difficult to divide as they indicate various categories including sounds of all parts of body, trees, water objects, wind objects and other nature-related sounds. In table 1, examples are given more in detail.

I. Collective nouns

Singular in form but referring to a group of things, collective (or group) nouns in Lari are those nouns which have affixes and denotes a collection of persons regarded as a unit. To give an example, we can refer to /ta:yfæ/ (the clan) or /gælæ/ (the cattle). Table 1 shows another example of collective nouns.

V. CONCLUSION

Lari is one of the middle Persian languages which possess a different conjugational system. This fact gets more obvious when we examine the nominal system for various categories in this language. This research examined the various categories of nominal system in Lari as an Iranian endangered language in the framework of contrastive analysis. The results through tables showed that there were specific features for nominal system in Lari that distinguished it from that of Persian; it means the structure that Lari uses in categories of nominal system is very uniquely defined. Regarding the aforementioned points and the table1, the results showed that definite nouns in Lari are made by adding /ʊ/ or /kæ/ at the end of the words (e.g., /kæmutære ʧʊ/ [the dove] or /mærdækæ/ [the man]) whereas the indefinite nouns are made as added /i/ or /e/ (e.g., /doti/ [a girl] or /leʧe/ [a lizard]). Also, singular nouns in Lari had no special inflection but plural ones are added /yâ/ or /iyâ/ (e.g., / æʤmæyâ/ [T-shirts] and /ʃoviyâ/ [nights]). About the simple and complex nouns, it was revealed that simple nouns had no special marker but complex nouns were made through the combination of verbal or nominal units (/gælæbu/ (shepherd) = /gælæ/ (the flock) + /bu/ (the responsible) or /næʧʧi/ (nail clippers) = /næʧ/ (nail) + /ʧi/ (to cut)). In addition, derivatives are made via adding derivational morphemes to the noun or verbs. Lari utilizes its own morphological system in regard to the place and function of

derivational morphemes; for example, /ʧuːb/ + /i/ = /ʧuːbi/ (made of wood) or /kɑʊ/ (straw) + /duː/ = /kɑʊduː/ (hayloft).

TABLE I
NOMINAL SYSTEM CATEGORIES IN LARI LANGUAGE

Nominal System Classifications		Possible Marker/ application	Examples in Lari	English Equivalent
Definite vs. indefinite	definite	/ʊ/ or /kæ/	zenekæ	The woman
	indefinite	/i/ or /e/	zeneki	A woman
Singular vs. plural	singular	number	dot	Girl
	plural	/yâ/ or /iyâ/	dotiyâ	Girls
Simple vs. complex	simple	structure	keʤil	Finger
	complex	wide range of affixes and units	tuːppa næx pæræ nebozæ	Football Scissors Impossible
Derivatives vs. simple	derivatives	wide range of suffixes	bæli ʃiːʃæy	Sandy Glassy
	simple	structure	bæl ʃiːʃæ	Sand Glass
Proper vs. common nouns	proper	specific	pæmezæk	Crocodile
	common	General feature	pɑʊ kælæm	The sheep The pen
Concrete vs. abstract nouns	concrete	in-mind reference	âsemuː miː	The sky The hair
	abstract	out-of-mind reference	ʃeri ʃuːx	Sweet pretty
Onomatopoeia	onomatopoeia	nature-based sound	kæp kæp fuːk	Squelch Pop
Diminutives	diminutives	smallness	bæinuː	Bride
Collectives	collectives	unit	dæstægæ	Group

In Lari, in addition, proper nouns deal with the names of trees and places (e.g., /kælpok/ (a sort of lizard), or /ʃâxoni/ (the name of a specific palm tree)) while common nouns include names like /ʤoti/ (the shoes). Moreover, diminutives These frequently applicable nouns are made through adding morphemes of /a/, /o/, /e/ and /u/ at the end of the nouns; for example, /bæinuː/ (shrinking form for the bride). Furthermore, onomatopoeia as nature-based sounds contains words like /kæp kæp/ (splash) and /forkæ/ (slurp). Finally, it was revealed that collective (or group) nouns denoting a collection of persons regarded as a unit can be defined in Lari as /taːyfæ/ (the clan) or /gælæ/ (the cattle). Totally, it can be concluded that the system that Lari employs in describing nominal system is very unique which differs from that of Persian.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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