

# Shuan Osman Karim [ʃwan]

PHD CANDIDATE · LINGUISTICS

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## Hiring Committee

The University of Toronto

August 12, 2022

## Application for The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies

Dear hiring committee,

## About Me

I graduated with my Ph.D. from the Department of Linguistics at Ohio State University on December 19th, 2021. My dissertation, supervised by Brian D. Joseph, focused on issues in the morphosyntax of New Western Iranian languages. Some significant contributions are a novel analysis of the syntax of the *ezafe* (linking particle, e.g., New Persian *-e* in *ketab-e xub* 'good book') and a typological examination of the interaction of nominal modification (adjectival or genitival), case (direct, oblique, etc.), number (singular or plural), gender (masculine or feminine), and definiteness (definite, indefinite, or absolute). My research interests are synchronic and diachronic morphology, syntax, and phonology and the way these domains interact with one another. Additionally, there is an areal component to my work, advancing the study of languages and language varieties spoken across the greater Iranian world, as well as the classical languages of the region. I intend to contribute to the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies by bringing broad knowledge of Iranian languages, peoples, and their history, along with a targeted historical linguistic skill set. Additionally, I see the potential to collaborate with members of the institute, such as Dr. Arsalan Kahnemuyipour, whose research interests closely mirror my own. I anticipate being able to contribute to his Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded project "The Syntax of Nominal Linkers," which shares a partial focus with the part of my dissertation that deals with the *ezafe* particle.

I have received a B.A. in linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin and a Master's and Ph.D. in Linguistics from the Ohio State University. Inspired by my undergraduate adviser at UT, Pattie Epps, I determined to focus on under-documented and endangered languages. Under the tutelage of Professor Joseph, I developed a strong foundation in Neo-Grammarian historical linguistics, morphology, and general linguistic theory. I have built upon this foundation across several of my independent research projects. I have contributed to the forthcoming *Advances in Iranian Linguistics II*, the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, and *Neglected syntactic functions and non-syntactic functions of Applicative Morphology*, and produced a dissertation entitled *The synchrony and diachrony of New Western Iranian nominal morphosyntax*, covering topics including diachrony, typology, syntactic theory, and morphological theory.

In addition to my training in diachronic linguistics, involving the study of language change, I am a co-author of 'Modeling morphological learning, typology, and change: What can the neural sequence-to-sequence framework contribute?' in the *Journal of Language Modelling*, a survey of research using neural sequence-to-sequence models as computational models of morphological learning. I have also worked in Hybrid Type-Logical Categorical Grammar (HTLCG), a theory that assumes that syntactic combinatorics are stored in the lexicon. In the third chapter of my dissertation "An HTLCG account of the *ezafe*," I explore nominal modification in Western Iranian languages giving the first theoretical account of *ezafe* or attribution/construct-state marking on nominals as derivational morphology. Patterns of Western Iranian that I uncovered in that exploration led me to hypothesize that lexicalist approaches to syntax alter the way we approach syntactic change diachronically. This exploration was the topic of my recent presentation at the 25th International Conference on Historical Linguistics, "Towards a new paradigm in Historical Syntax."

## Academic goals

I intend to continue researching the synchrony of the New Iranian languages. Many New Iranian languages are in desperate need of scholarly study. For these languages, a good theoretically oriented synchronic analysis does not exist. This is true of Iranian languages spoken in remote areas by few speakers inside and outside Iran. However, it is also true for most spoken varieties of New Persian, which have continued an unbroken chain of transmission and should be studied in their

own right.

I intend to continue researching the diachrony of the New Iranian languages. In the Iranian world (and the Middle East in general), many great myths and legends capture our shared history as Iranians. However, many of the specific details seemingly have been lost to time. We have a metaphorical time machine that gives us a clear picture of ancient Iran from the attestation of Avestan and Old Persian, and we have a wealth of knowledge from the modern languages, their literature, and poetry. However, there is a vacuum between Old and Middle Iranian and the modern languages and language varieties. My diachronic interest is not in the most ancient history but in the forgotten near history of these languages and the people who speak them.

I intend to explore these languages and become a full professor at a Research 1 university that allows me to continue this research trajectory. I see my coming to the University of Toronto as an essential step toward accomplishing this goal. I seek the opportunity to continue to develop my teaching skills on my research trajectory while becoming a member of your research community.

I submit this application for your consideration. I am looking forward to your positive reply.

Sincerely,



**Shuan Osman Karim**