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Synopsis of monograph and research interests

Research interests

My research interests include synchronic and diachronic morphology, phonology, and syntax. I am focused on the Western Iranian languages, and I have worked on topics concerning Northern, Central, and Southern Kurdish, Zazaki, Gorani, Tati, Talyshi, Gilaki, and Colloquial New Persian. Additionally, I have studied Old and Middle Indo-Iranian languages, including, on the Indic side, Sanskrit (Classical and Vedic) and, more importantly for my research focus, on the Iranian side, Avestan, Old and Middle Persian, Parthian, and Sogdian. I believe my knowledge of Iranian languages throughout history and my intimate connection to the languages of Western Iran make me uniquely qualified to explore open questions in the development of these languages.

In the short term, I intend to build upon the foundation of my dissertation Karim (2021) *The synchrony and diachrony of New Western Iranian nominal morphosyntax* to publish a monograph that will become the handbook on Iranian nominal systems, e.g., the combinations of nouns with various modifiers and other grammatical markers. In the long term, I will continue to work on diachronic issues in Iranian linguistics, particularly the convergence of verbal systems among Iranian languages and among Iranian and other regional languages (e.g., North Eastern Neo-Aramaic, Turkic, etc.).

Monograph — Nominal systems of New Western Iranian: their study, their history, and the history of their study

In this monograph, I undertake a synchronic study of nominal marking in Iranian languages as it has evolved, develop a detailed account of the types of nominal systems and their distribution across the Iranian world, and document their diachronic development from Proto-Iranian to the diverse modern Iranian languages. I pay particularly close attention to the development of definiteness marking strategies that have recently become known thanks to the work of Nourzaei (2020) and nominal modification strategies (the *ezafe*, see Kent, 1944; Haider & Zwanziger, 1984; Samian, 1994; Ghomeshi, 1997; Samvelian, 2005, 2007, 2008; Karimi & Brame, 2012; Kahnemuyipour, 2014, 2016; Larson & Samian, 2020; Karim, 2021). I provide a complete view of the empirical field from two perspectives: (1) how Iranian languages express various grammatical functions in the nominal system, and (2) how cognate constructions function in the various languages. In addition to this synchronic study, I provide answers to several diachronic problems, which include: (1) why there is such variety in nominal marking systems among Iranian languages, (2) why some Iranian languages feature a rare type of syncretism, a merger between the oblique-singular and the direct-plural markers (according to Arkadiev, 2007, this is unique to Iranian), (3) how Iranian languages transitioned from languages with adjectival and genitival modifiers to languages with *ezafe*, construct-state marking, and (4) why *ezafe* marking is so highly differentiated in languages like Zazaki and Kurmanji, with formatives from as many as five diachronic sources (following Karim, 2021).

The nominal systems of New Western Iranian languages are highly diverse. They range from languages like Standard New Persian, featuring minimal marking (e.g., *ezafe*, definite direct object, specific indefinite, and plural), to languages like Zazaki, featuring maximal distinctions involving six categories: case, number, gender, animacy, definiteness, and *ezafe*. The formatives that make up the nominal morphology of Standard New Persian seem to be from innovative sources, while the Zazaki morphemes seem to be inherited. When examined closely, it becomes clear that waves of changes have built various nominal systems in New Western Iranian languages that can be described as layered.

The almost complete reduction of the Old Iranian case system that arose due to the loss of word-final codas was replaced by innovative marking many times. Each of these innovations took place in a subset of the nominal domain. For instance,

unmodified nouns in Zazaki are not marked for case, number, gender, or animacy. However, definite nouns are maximally marked. Similarly, Colloquial New Persian singular nouns are marked for definiteness, while plural nouns are not.

When cognate constructions are examined across the family, certain patterns come to light. For instance, languages that underwent the loss of *k* between vowels early on feature gender marking on nouns with the *-Vka diminutive/evaluative suffix. For some of these languages, the result is differential case marking; for others, gendered variant forms of the ezafe, and for others, innovative declension classes. In this monograph, I follow each of these threads to describe the rich tapestry that is Iranian nominal morphology.

In its present form, my dissertation requires a stylistic reworking before it can become a monograph. Additionally, it must be augmented by new information from my active research, integration of data from more Iranian languages, and publications since my defense in July 2021. I envision this monograph to be approximately 400p. It will consist of three sections:

1. “The history of the study of the Iranian Noun” details the various active debates, particularly concerning the status of nominal modification.
2. “Asynchronic analysis of Iranian nominal systems” provides a synchronic description of the various nominal systems in Iranian languages with a comparative phylogeny. This section includes sub-sections for each language under consideration.
3. “A diachronic account of the development of Iranian nominal systems” provides a diachronic analysis of the various Iranian nominal systems by type, including discussions of disputes between scholars on this matter. This section is structured according to shared innovations between languages.

During the period of The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies, I plan to restructure the relevant sections of my dissertation to conform to the chapters I have laid out here, including descriptions of the individual languages. I will also conduct some new research during this period, including the comparative classification of the nominal systems from historical and typological perspectives. I envision publishing this monograph with one of the leading publishers in linguistics as part of a series, such as *Current Issues in Linguistics Theory* (John Benjamins) or *Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs* (Mouton De Gruyter).