

Refining the questionnaire for the *Atlas of the Languages of Iran (ALI)*

Universität Bamberg, July 2017

Orientation and instructions for participants

1. The ALI questionnaire: experiences, limitations and prospects

The ALI questionnaire (draft version available at: <https://carleton.ca/iran/questionnaires/>) has been developed with the input of a number of scholars over the past three years and carried out in more than 30 locations in several provinces of Iran. While any research methodology that uses elicitation is limited in what it can accomplish, the questionnaire forms an integral tool for collecting a systematic data set for the language atlas from language varieties across the country.

So far, various scholars who have used the questionnaire have found it useful in assembling a coherent, though cursory, overview of linguistics forms in a given location. Other aspects of the questionnaire, and the research process in general, are challenging and need to be reviewed.

In this workshop, we will focus on refining the questionnaire:

- Which topics are most important to investigate, and which questions should be modified, added, or removed?
- In light of the fact that the questionnaire was originally designed with Iranian languages in mind, how can it be adapted or supplemented for other individual language families in Iran, each of which has a unique set of historical-comparative and typological issues?

Each participant will have a chance to propose improvements based on their reflection on the questionnaire and their experience using it.

One complementary component of language data collection which is not part of the questionnaire, but which we view as essential to provide a more balanced picture of language, is the recording, transcription and analysis of texts; ALI team members are therefore collecting texts in each research site. However, this aspect of the Atlas is beyond the scope of the workshop.

2. Preparatory questionnaire activity and report (to carry out and submit by May 15), and detailed notes (to bring to the workshop)

In preparation for the workshop, participants will **carry out, record and transcribe the questionnaire** with a speaker of any language of Iran. Suggestions for language varieties, and alternative research possibilities, are available upon request.

Based on this experience, and in preparation for workshop activities, participants will take **detailed notes** on issues such as the following:

- What are your general impressions about the questionnaire? Is it an appropriate length? Are the various parts given an appropriate amount of time?
- What should be the language, or languages of the questionnaire documents: Persian, and/or English? If more than one language is needed, should a single combined version be used, or separate versions?

- Are there some parts that work fine without knowing the target language well, but other parts that are better completed by experts already familiar with the language (or at least the language family)?
- What questions should be added to the questionnaire – either generally, or to address key issues for the language family or families that you study? Please think about what specific words, phonological questions, and grammatical constructions should be included for the relevant language family – Iranian, Turkic, Semitic, or other families that you work with.
- Are there questions that do not contribute data that is important or enough to justify their inclusion in the questionnaire?
- Which questions are ambiguous or hard to elicit using English, Persian, or any other language of elicitation that you might have used? Which questions are hard to elicit because of the unmarked or complex nature of the topic in the language that is being studied?
- Are there some questions which are not fully culturally appropriate and, if so, are they of sufficient linguistic importance to justify keeping them in the questionnaire?
- What questions are problematic for any other reason? Why?

In order to make the workshop discussion as useful as possible, we hope that you'll have at tangible suggestions for each area for improvement that you identify in the questionnaire.

Participants will then submit a **one-page summary report** of their impressions and observations to the organizers, by May 15.

Participants will hold onto their complete detailed notes, to bring to the workshop in preparation for the discussions and questionnaire design sessions.

3. Presentations at the workshop (Day 2 – Saturday, July 8)

On the second full day of the workshop, a series of participants will have a chance to present their observations on the questionnaire process, the questionnaire itself, and the language variety studied using the questionnaire. Each presentation can be in the form of a formal paper, or as an informal discussion, depending on the wish of the presenter.

(See the accompanying provisional Workshop Program document for details of presenters and topics.)

Each person who is presenting as part of this topic series will have 15 minutes (10-minute presentation plus 5 minutes for questions). In your presentation, please select:

- 3 interesting linguistic observations that you were able to make based on the data you collected; and
- 3 areas (major or minor) where the questionnaire or the questionnaire process could be improved.

4. Other activities at the workshop

Pre-workshop event (Thursday):

Bayerisches Orient-Kolloquium lecture by Yaron Matras in the evening – see the accompanying Workshop Program document for details.

Day 1 (Friday, July 7):

As is evident from the accompanying provisional Workshop Program document, the first day will be devoted to global considerations of the Atlas Project, the Atlas questionnaire, and several other important projects and questionnaires. There will be a workshop dinner at the end of this day.

Day 2 (Saturday, July 8):

Following the series of language- and questionnaire-related presentations by workshop participants on the morning of the second day (point 3 above), the larger part of this day will be devoted to practical working sessions focused on refining of the ALI questionnaire. For these sessions, participants will divide into working groups based on the language families of their own interest, and will present their proposals to all of the participants toward the end of the workshop.