

# Reviews

**The Languages and Linguistics of Western Asia: An Areal Perspective (The world of Linguistics Series, volume 6)**, Geoffrey Haig and Geoffrey Khan (eds.), Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2018, ISBN 978-3-11-042608-3 (hbk), 976 pp.

*The Languages and Linguistics of Western Asia* is one of the volumes of the handbook series *The World of Linguistics*, which aims to present an up-to-date overview of linguistic work on the world's languages. The volume provides descriptions of around twenty languages which are spoken in eastern Turkey, western Iran and northern Iraq. The area covered in this book is linked to the ancient cultural core of Mesopotamia, and also includes the mountainous regions of the Zagros in the southeast and extends up the Anatolian Plateau to the outliers of the Caucasus. This area is subdivided into five regions in this book, and each section of the book deals with the languages of each region: eastern Anatolia and northwestern Iran, northern Iraq, western Iran, the Caspian region and south Azerbaijan, and the Caucasian rim and southern Black Sea coast. In addition to these five main sections, the book contains an introduction written by the editors, and an appendix with comparative lists of lexical items from the languages treated in the book.

The editors clarify that this volume focuses on the minority languages of the region, and the official languages (Persian, Turkish and Arabic) are not considered in a separate section. Of course, not all languages of the region are described because of practical considerations. The main purpose of each section is to provide a synchronic

description of each language within a sub-region, while explicitly referring to contact issues. In the overview chapter at the beginning of each sub-region, a short synopsis of major contact phenomena is provided. In this area, languages are spoken from four distinct language families; Semitic, Indo-European, Turkic, and Kartvelian, and within the Indo-European family, the languages are from four main branches; Armenian, Indic, Iranian and Hellenic. The main part of the introduction is devoted to introducing some general contact matters in phonology, morpho-syntax and constituent order in the languages of the area. The issues addressed are the marking of definiteness, commonalities in pronominal and case morphology, clitic pronouns indexing verbal categories, position of copular elements, order of direct object and verb, and OVG (direct object–verb–goal) word order.

The first section of the book is devoted to the languages of eastern Anatolia and the languages of Iraq. Geoffrey Khan contributes the overview chapter and four more chapters are included in this section, two on Indo-European languages: “The Armenian Dialects” (Hrac Martirosyan) and “Northern Kurdish” (Geoffrey Haig), and two on Semitic languages: “The Arabic Dialects of Eastern Anatolia” (Stephan Procházka) and “The Neo-Aramaic Dialects of Eastern Anatolia and Northwestern Iran” (Geoffrey Khan). Modern Armenian, which was canonized in the nineteenth century, has two main branches: western (based on western dialects especially Constantinople) and eastern (spoken on the Ararat plain and nearby) and around sixty dialects could be distinguished (some of them extinct), mainly based on the formation of consonant system and the formation of the indicative present. Armenian has its own writing system. Martirosyan talks about the multi-feature classification of Armenian dialects into western and eastern groups and gives a short synopsis of its phonology, morphology and the syntax of basic sentences for each member. Northern Kurdish or Kurmanjî, spoken in eastern Anatolia, is a northwest Iranian language, and Haig gives a brief history, the current situation and a grammatical sketch of it based on the dialect of Cizre and Botan in southeastern Turkey. The author also discusses the regional variation and the contact issues and he provides a short text which is glossed. The next chapter is on vernacular Arabic, which is spoken in different parts of this area, from the city of Urfa in the west to Siirt in the east. Two main branches of Arabic are spoken in the region: *qəltu*, from the Anatolian branch of the Mesopotamian group, and *Šāwī*, of the Bedouin type. The last chapter in this section focuses on the Neo-Aramaic dialects of the area, belonging to Central Neo-Aramaic and Northeastern Neo-Aramaic. Khan provides a short history and description of the current situation of the dialects, with a sketch of the grammar and a short text which is glossed.

The structure of all the other sections is similar. In each section, an overview chapter is written and some single chapters deal with a single language (and sometimes its different dialects), introducing its history and current status in the region, a brief sketch of grammar and some contact issues plus a short text.

The third section is devoted to the languages spoken in northern Iraq, which is politically part of the Kurdistan Region. This region is multilingual today: Arabic and Neo-Aramaic from the Semitic group, Sorani, Kurmanjî Kurdish and Gorani from the Iranian family, and Turkman from the Turkic group. In the overview chapter,

the writers briefly talk about the similarities between the languages in this region due to language contact. Stephan Procházka contributes the first chapter of this section, “The Arabic Dialects of Northern Iraq,” focusing on the vernacular Arabic of Niniveh district. Geoffrey Haig discusses “The Iranian Languages of the Northern Iraq,” which include Behdinī (which is the local name for Kurmanjî Kurdish), Sorani Kurdish and Gorani (whose relation to Kurdish is a matter of contrast), all from the northwestern Iranian family. The chapter is a very good overview of structural features of these varieties and a good amount of comparative material. “The Neo-Aramaic Languages of Northern Iraq” is written by Geoffrey Khan, who talks about different dialects and subgroups of dialects in this region. The last chapter of this section, by Christiane Bulut, is on “Iraq-Turkic,” or Turkmanja. The speech communities are found in different areas in this region, often between Kurdish and Arabic regions. The author estimates that about 1.3 million Turkman live in Iraq.

Section four covers western Iran. Two of the languages discussed in this section, Turkic (Christiane Bulut) and Persian (Ludwig Paul), are not restricted to the west of Iran. Eric Anonby and Morteza Taheri-Ardali contribute a chapter on Bakhtiari, an Iranian language spoken in the Zagros mountains, which is described based on the documented dialect of Masjed Soleyman. Khan contributes another chapter on the Neo-Aramaic dialects of this region, and there is a chapter on the Hawrami (Parwin Mahmoudveysi and Denise Bailey), an Iranian language spoken mainly in Kermanshah province. Christina van der Wal Anonby’s chapter is on Kumzari, a mixed language with Indo-Iranian and Arabian ancestors, which is mainly spoken in some parts of Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Larak Island in Iran.

The fifth section is a single chapter, “The Caspian Region and South Azarbaijan: Caspian and Tatic,” by Donald Stilo. The languages discussed in this chapter are from two northwest Iranian families: Caspian, a long dialect chain from the Mazandarani dialects of Gorgān in the east to the Gilaki dialects of Anzali in the west; and Tatic family, which includes Tati, Talyshi and Tatoid dialects; two Tati-like offshoots, Rudbāri and Taleghāni.

Section six is on the languages of the Cacaasian rim and southern Black Sea coast and covers three languages: Ossetic, Romeyka and Laz. Renè Lacroix contributes a chapter on Laz which belongs to the South Caucasian or Kartvelian language which is spoken in northeastern Turkey and also in Georgia. David Erschler writes on Ossetic, an eastern Iranian language, spoken in North Ossetia-Alania within Russia and some part of Georgia. And the final chapter in this section, by Laurentia Schreiber, discusses Romeyka, which is in the Hellenic family, from Indo-European. This language is spoken by Muslim communities on the southern Black Sea coast in Turkey. The last section of the book is an appendix which lists basic lexical items in selected languages of western Asia and some notes on sources.

It is evident that in such a short review it is not possible to give a satisfactory overview of the many details of the languages discussed in this volume. However, this volume has some features which distinguish it from other similar works, especially on Iranian languages. The first feature is that it has an areal linguistic viewpoint, covering a vast area in western Asia, focusing on different languages from different language

families. Hence, the languages in this book are not from a single language family and they are mainly described and compared based on their regional contiguity. This areal look brings the second main feature of the volume: attention to contact linguistic matters. In all overview chapters and nearly in all chapters on different languages, the writers have considered contact linguistic matters at different levels: phonology, morphology and syntax. This innovative way of looking at the languages of this area provides a better way of understanding the linguistic matters in these languages. The third notable feature is that the chapters are written based on a single homogenous outline and the writers have followed a predetermined pattern when discussing the different languages. They have all started by introducing the languages in each chapter, their origin, their present sociocultural state and population, then providing a grammar sketch of the main phonological, and morpho-syntactic features, discussing dialectal variations and mostly providing a short text which is glossed. This order makes the volume more useful, especially for those who want to compare these different languages at different levels. Another feature of the book is the use of linguistic maps in every chapter which show the linguistic areas in the whole region. And it should be added that providing many examples from different languages, which are mostly based on documented natural examples, is another advantage of this volume.

To sum up, *The Languages and Linguistics of Western Asia* is a very informative and valuable reference for studying these languages. Undoubtedly, any future researcher interested in these languages will benefit from looking at this book and it will remain a highly standard reference work for these scholars.

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**The Oxford Handbook of Persian Linguistics**, Anousha Sedighi and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, ISBN 978-0-19-873674-5 (hbk), 608 pp.

The official establishment of the first Department of Linguistics at Tehran University in the 1970s gave an academic prestige to this field of Humanities and made it an attractive discipline for many scholars who had not even heard of it before. At the outset, the research agenda of this department was mainly directed toward historical studies. However, upon the return of some pioneering linguists such as the late Hormoz Milani, Mohammad-Reza Bat eni, and Ali-Ashraf Sadeqi from Europe, this general tendency began to change and a strong theoretical tradition was gradually established. Since then, with the advent of the second and third generations of linguists who were educated in Iran and abroad, and also due to the flourishing and