



Atlas of the Languages of Iran (ALI)

Questionnaire instructions

(version: 2022/01/14)

About the ALI questionnaire

The ALI (*Atlas of the Languages of Iran*) questionnaire is designed to gather a systematic selection of important linguistic structures from languages across Iran. It is part of the ALI research programme, but may be used by anyone, if it is helpful for their own research. The questionnaire and all accompanying documents are available at: <https://carleton.ca/iran/questionnaires>.

The questionnaire is designed to be carried out in a single 2- to 3-hour session. The time you will need, as well as the quality of the data you gather, will vary depending on your experience with the language and many other factors specific to each site.

It is important to receive language documentation training, including procedures for recording, before carrying out the questionnaire. This can be done as part of a language documentation training workshop, or individually by joining more experienced Atlas team members when they carry out research.

A fuller discussion of the questionnaire, including its sources, development, structure, and what it measures, are found in Anonby et. al (in preparation) and Taheri-Ardali, Anonby and Haig (in preparation).

You are welcome send any questions, comments or suggestions to the Atlas team at: erik.anonby@carleton.ca or taheriling@gmail.com.

How to use the ALI questionnaire

Before carrying out the ALI questionnaire, please read each of the following instructions carefully, to help you plan and carry out your research.

Preparation for fieldwork

- There are four main parts in the questionnaire: Introduction, Lexicon, Morphosyntax, Numbers. Collection of oral texts also accompanies implementation of the questionnaire in each location.
- If you are using the questionnaire for the first time, read all items carefully so that you will be familiar with it before you carry it out.
- If you are carrying the questionnaire out for submission to ALI, ensure that you choose an optimal research location – a site for which data has not yet been collected, and which is not too close (linguistically or geographically) to existing data collection sites. You can contact the editors of ALI to discuss planning for research locations.
- Whenever possible, carry out the questionnaire as part of a team of 2 or 3 people.
- It's best to get experience using the questionnaire with a language you are already familiar with.
- Before travelling to the field location, read all available books and articles on the language of this location (or, if this is not available, you can read about language varieties that are closely related). This will help you to anticipate the structures that you might find.
- Whenever possible, make sure to have a contact ready in the field location before arriving. This can be a friend or acquaintance. If you're unable to find anyone, the local governor or the village council members may be able to help you find people to work with.
- Make sure to bring all necessary materials for the interview session: several paper copies of the questionnaire, clipboards, recording equipment (audio and video recorders, cords, microphones, good quality headphones or earbuds, extra batteries and memory cards, a power cord with multiple outlets), pens (not pencils), and a gift (for example, pulaki, nabat, chocolate, halva from your hometown, etc.) to thank the speakers with after the session is finished.

We are currently working on supplements to the questionnaire to address questions that are important for individual language families other than Iranian. These will be made available as soon as they are completed.

Working with speakers

- It's important to be respectful of your hosts, and to make your interest for their language and culture clear.
- By default, whenever possible, only select speakers a) whose families are originally from the exact city or village being studied, b) who have themselves grown up in this location, c) have lived there most of their life, and d) currently live there.)
- Select speakers for whom the language you are studying is both mother tongue (i.e., the first main language learned in the home) and their current dominant language. Exceptions to this might include cases where there are no perfectly fluent speakers of an endangered language left, as well as in some language contact studies where Persian or another language is now the speaker's dominant language.
- Make it clear to the speakers that you would like answers based on how people normally talk, rather than forms that are similar to a related standard language such as Persian, Turkish or Arabic, or unnaturally "pure" forms of the language.
- Try to avoid selecting speakers who might try to impose an unnatural kind of language, for example language purists, activists, and lexicographers.
- Try to bring together a group of interviewees with two or three people, and to obtain the basic responses from only one of them. It is fine if the others contribute, but one speaker should give answers to all the questions, and the others should not interrupt them when they are giving each answer for the first time. To encourage a limited amount of discussion and to get input on the range of possibilities in a language, we recommend working with 1 older speaker, 1 middle-aged speaker, and 1 younger speaker. If the goal of the interview is to gather the most linguistically distinctive forms, it's best to have the older speaker answering the questions. If the goal is to look at language contact phenomena, it's best to have the younger speaker answering the questions. It's also a good idea to work with the most enthusiastic and cooperative of the speakers, as the main person to answer the questions. On your paper, indicate which speaker is the person giving the first answers to the questionnaire.
- Make sure each person is able to speak clearly.
- Make it clear to the speakers that the format of the interview will be question, then answer. The interviewer should not add any discussion, unless it is related to clarifying questions or answers. Extra discussion adds unnecessary hours to sound file editing and to the transcription of each interview. In the case that speakers discuss other topics, or if there is any interruption to the interview, pause the sound recorders.

Recording and transcribing

- High recording quality is essential!

- It is important to make a high-quality recording of the whole questionnaire session, using two high-quality recorders, ideally in .wav (not .mp3) format. Both recorders should be operating simultaneously. Later, the recorded data will be converted to .mp3 format and made available in the Atlas. Recordings help ensure the reliability of the data and are helpful for further analysis.
- If you have a phone that makes very good quality recordings, you can use this as the second recording device. When you are video recording, it is sufficient to use one sound recorder along with the video recording, as long as the video recording has good sound quality.
- Test the recording set-up before going to the field location, to ensure that you know how to work with the equipment and to ensure sound (or video) quality. Make sure that you have sufficient free storage space on your recording device, as well as extra memory cards in case one is full or something goes wrong with it. Also, make sure that your recording device is fully charged and that you have extra batteries with you.
- If your recording device has a high pass filter (also called “low cut filter”) option, do not turn it on. This same function can be applied in post processing of the recording, and you may lose an important part of the phonetic signal if you turn it on.
- At the field location, before you start carrying out the questionnaire, test the quality of the recording again by checking a short recorded sample with good quality earbuds or headphones. To minimize interferences in the sound quality, the recorders should be placed on a soft floor surface floor (not in your hands or on a desk), on a stand if possible, about 50 cm from the mouth of the speaker.
- For optimal sound quality, it is essential to choose a quiet room with as many soft surfaces (such as carpets) as possible, and minimal echo or reverberations in the room. Do not record in rooms with only hard surfaces, such as workplaces or university buildings. As much as possible, there should be no noise from other people nearby, from phone, television or radio, from machines or traffic, or from other sources.
- Turn your own phone off (not just on “silent”). Ask speakers to turn their phones completely off as well, because the signals interfere with the recordings. This will also help to minimize interruptions during the recording sessions.
- Before collecting any responses, it is essential to read and record a clear permission text (there is an example provided with the questionnaire), and the speakers’ oral consent to this text.
- Record each section of the interview (Introduction, Lexicon, Morphosyntax, Numbers; and each of the oral texts) into a separate audio/video file. On each recording, before beginning each section, give a summary of metadata for that recording section: date and time, researcher name, research location, speaker name, questionnaire section.

- When recording, it is essential that each answer is stated clearly at least once on the recording, at a slow speed but in a natural way, and without any interruption by people or by other sounds. This is essential for recording clarity, to help complete the questionnaire in a timely way, and to make the file useful for analysis later on.
- In addition to recording with sound recorders, you may wish to transcribe all the responses on paper during the interview, because even obvious phonetic details can be hard to hear on a recording. It is not necessary (or possible) to have a perfect transcription at this point – just transcribe as well as you can, without delaying the interview too much when you are writing. Instead of erasing any mistake in your transcription, simply cross it out and write the correct form beside it, because often your first impression is correct, and you can make a final decision when analyzing the data later on. For your transcription, and to make handwritten notes about other details in the interview, make sure you have printed copies of the questionnaire with you.
- If you have trouble figuring out how to transcribe a certain word, try not to push the speaker to pronounce it more than twice, as long as it has been pronounced clearly for the sound recorders.
- For elicitation of words in the Lexicon section, when additional clarification is needed, use only the additional descriptions and sentences already provided in the questionnaire. If you make up additional example sentences, it is no longer possible to maintain consistency across all questionnaires, and you may unintentionally push speakers to use a specific grammatical forms (for example, habitual verb forms) that are not intended.
- Never say to a speaker what you think the answer should be, or complete their answer for them. Never provide a specific word or other grammatical form as a suggestion, even if you expect something else. However, if you think the speaker is not using a usual or authentic form, you may ask: “Is there another word that you often use for this?” or “Is there another way you often say this?” Use this option sparingly, since it interrupts the flow of questions. Instead, especially if the extra questions might lead to discussion, consider coming back after the interview to questions where you think the speaker did not give a valid equivalent. You can do this either directly after the interview or after you have completed analysis of the questionnaire. In both cases, make sure to record the speaker’s updated responses. These points are essential, even if you yourself are a speaker of the language you are researching.
- Whenever a person leaves the room or a new speaker is answering the questions, it is important to indicate this on the paper.
- If you have some familiarity with the language, use a phonemic transcription, with additional phonetic symbols and detail for segments whose phonemic value is unclear. If you have no familiarity with the language, you can make a phonetic transcription. Take notes about anything that you’re not sure about. See the instructions at <https://carleton.ca/iran/transcription> for more details regarding phonemic transcription of language data.

- If there are two or more responses for a single question, make sure to write all alternatives, and separate them with a slash (“/”). Put them in order from the most common to least common, and make sure to ask any other exact differences in the meaning or usage (for example older vs. younger speakers) of the term.
- For oral texts (stories, histories, songs, poems, procedural texts, etc.), always make a high-quality video recording as well as an audio recording, since these materials are valuable as a long-term record of the language for future generations. Read the accompanying tutorial document, “Collecting linguistic data: Video and audio recording of oral texts”.

Special instructions for Sociolinguistic context section, Question 4

Question 4.b in the “Sociolinguistic context” section is one of the more difficult parts of the questionnaire to carry out efficiently and systematically.

Question 4.a, which is straightforward but necessary to mention here as background, reads:

“What do the people in the community call their own language(s) [as listed in Q2] in their own local pronunciation?”

Question 4.b reads:

“For each language variety mentioned, are there specific sub-varieties that are spoken here? And, is this variety part of another, larger language grouping? Finally, what label do you use for each of these varieties, for example “language”, “dialect”, or another term?”

This latter question necessitates a short conversation with the speaker(s), as follows:

1) First, ask about sub-types of the mentioned variety, all the way down to their particular local sub-variety of this variety; and then where the mentioned variety fits in to the most general grouping possible, so that you have a complete picture of their understanding of its classification.

A possible example of such a dialogue between speaker and researcher for a single language variety label – not to be read out during the interview – is: “I speak Achomi.” “What kind of Achomi?” “We call the language of our village Moghdāni. It’s actually like a kind of Bastaki.” “How does Bastaki relate to Achomi?” “Bastaki is a kind of Achomi”. “Does Achomi belong to another larger language grouping?” “Well, actually, Achomi is like Lāri. It’s like the same language.” “And is Achomi – Lāri – part of another larger language group?” “Yes, we consider Achomi to be a kind of Fārsi” (or “No, Achomi is a language which is different from Fārsi.”)

2) When this is complete, ask what label people use for each variety: “language”, “dialect”, or another label (in which case, please specify this label).

An example result for this completed question (also given inside the questionnaire itself) is as follows:

language communities: [researcher lists languages	language variety names from most general variety to most specific:	type of language variety: “language”, from Q2] “dialect”, or other (specify what type):
<i>Achomi</i>	<i>Fārsi</i> [most general]	<i>zabān</i>
	<i>Achomi</i> or <i>Lāri</i>	<i>zabān</i>
	<i>Bastaki</i>	<i>lahjeh</i>
	<i>Moghdāni</i> [most specific]	<i>lahjeh</i>

After the interview

- Make sure to retain the contact information (phone number, etc.) of the speakers you have worked with so that you can check any questions about the data later on. However, do not include this information in the materials you submit to the Atlas.
- As soon as you are finished each session, copy the recordings onto your laptop and an external hard drive, in case anything happens to the files on the sound recorders.
- Listen to both recordings (i.e., recordings from both devices used) for each part of the questionnaire. Decide which one has better quality. For the one with poorer quality, add the words “2nd device” to the end of the filename.
- As soon as possible after the fieldwork event is finished, and while the interview is still fresh in your mind, type your transcription into the fillable Word document, and correct any shortcomings in your original transcription there.
- Send the transcribed questionnaire files and the recordings to the relevant ALI province team manager, or to the ALI editors. Before sending any data for the first time, read the “ALI Contributor Agreement” document, which is available along with the questionnaire at the page: <https://carleton.ca/iran/questionnaires>. If you agree with this document, sign it and send it with the files. If you don’t agree with it, your data cannot be submitted to ALI, but you are still free to use the data you collected for your own research.
- At every stage of research, it is good to consult linguists who are familiar with the region or language family you are working on. Consider inviting others to help you with analysis and publication of the data you have collected.