

# Understanding the dialectology of Gilaki through lexical isoglosses

Hamideh Poshtvan & Mahnaz Talebi-Dastenaie

## Abstract

Gilan Province, located on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, Iran, has historically hosted Iranian and non-Iranian languages. Among these, Gilaki from the Caspian group, is the indigenous language of the Gil people in the province. Despite long history of research, a comprehensive analysis detailing the extent and varieties of Gilaki remains incomplete, as they have relied on sporadic data, collected either directly or indirectly by researchers. This data often Does not fully capture the geographic scope and variations within the language area, or the impact of interactions with other regional languages.

Initiating fieldwork in Gilan in 2021, we have collected a new dataset that includes Gilaki, and other languages of the province. The analysis of this dataset expands our knowledge of Gilaki's structural features and variations and its interactions with its neighbouring languages. Our objective is to accurately define the Gilaki language area and delineate its borders.

As an initial step toward achieving this goal, we have concentrated on analyzing lexical items and developing lexical isoglosses to understand variation at this level. This presentation will feature visualizations of isoglosses for selected lexical items, based on the data collected from various locations across the province. Utilizing QGIS, we have created maps that illustrate the geographic distribution and variation of each lexical item, both within and outside Gilaki-speaking communities. These maps are then used to build a map of lexical isoglosses.

While results are pending, we anticipate that the visualizations will reveal distinct patterns of lexical variation. We expect a clear demarcation of the linguistic boundary between Gilaki and the Talyshi of the Tatic group in the west, while the transition to the Toatoid group — also of the Tatic family — in the south is anticipated to be more gradual, reflecting a less defined border. Similarly, in the east, where Gilaki transitions to Central Caspian, we hypothesize a comparable gradual interface.

Keywords: language documentation, linguistic cartography, language mapping, lexical isoglosses, Caspian group, Gilaki, languages of Iran, dialectology.