The Sound System of Lawatiyya

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Abstract
Oman, located in the Arabian Peninsula, is a linguistically rich country with a number of indigenous languages one of which is Lawatiyya. This study presents the consonantal and vocalic phonemes of Lawatiyya, an Indo-Aryan language spoken by a Shiite minority in Oman. The identification and description of the phonemes are based on recordings of minimal pairs. Word stress is also identified.

Keywords: Indo-Aryan, Kachchi, Lawatiya,Lawatiyya, Oman, Phonemes, Sindhi.

I. Introduction

The Sultanate of Oman is located on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula with a population of 2.3 million people according to the 2003 census. No official statistics are available to the public as to the actual numbers of the various ethnolinguistic minorities in the country, however, estimates of the Lawatiya community in the 1970s range from 5,000 to 10,000 (Peterson, 2004) and 30,000 to 50,000 in 2010, or 3 per cent of the national population (Valeri, 2010).

The speakers of the language are called Lawatiya, Khojas or Hyderabadis (Salman &Kharusi, 2011; Valeri, 2010) and are mostly concentrated in the capital area of Muscat. A small number of families, however, are also found in the coastal towns of Saham, Barka, Khabura and Musana (Peterson, 2004). While their origins remain contested,

documentary evidence and community oral traditions place their arrival in Oman from Kutch, India, 300 to 400 years ago (Peterson, 2004).

This paper identifies the phonemic inventory of Lawatiyya[1]. It is to be noted that the study is a follow-up of an earlier one conducted by the authors which established for the first time the consonantal phonemes of Lawatiyya (Salman &Kharusi, 2011). In order to present a more comprehensive picture of the phonemes of the language, data from the previous study are also included.

II. Method

Due to the dearth of information on the language and its speakers, interviews with some members of theLawatiyacommunity were conducted in the summer of 2010.The aim of the interviews was to seek the community's perception of themselves and their language. The informants comprised of 16 females and seven males, with ages ranging from the 20s to 70s. Among the male informants, two were in their 70s and highly respected in the community for their knowledge of the language---including its script--- and the history of this minority.

In order to establish the phonemic inventory of Lawatiyya, sound recordings of minimal pairs or near minimal pairs were made using a native speaker of the language. One of the authors is also a native speaker of Lawatiyya.

III.   Results and Conclusion

A. The Language

The Lawatiyacommunity in Oman refersto its language as Khojki and believes it is based on Kachchi(also spelled as Cuchi, Kacchi, Kachhi, Kachchhi, Katchi) (Salman &Kharusi, 2011), a dialect of Sindhi. Sindhi, an Indo-Aryan language, is spoken primarily in Baluchistan, Pakistan and in the Gujarat and Rajasthan regions of India. In

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[1]There are two different spellings used in this paper: *Lawatiyya* (doubled y to represent gemination) and*Lawatiya*. The former refers to the language and the latter refers to the speakers of the language.

fact, the Indian Constitution in 1967 recognized it as one of the fifteen major languages of India (Khubchandani, 1981). Sindhi speakers, historically known for their overseas trade, have spread their language as far afield as Indonesia, Japan, East Africa and the Persian Gulf (Khubchandani, 1981).

The Sindhi dialect Kachchi is spoken primarily in the Cutch district of Gujarat, India and is one of the six major dialects of the language (Khubchandani, 1981). The other five dialectsare Siraiki, Vicholi, Lari, Lasi, and Thareli. The speakersof Lawatiyyaperceive a greater lexical similarity between their language and Kachchi than with Sindhi,and presently in Oman all three---Lawatiyya, Kachchi and Sindhi---are spoken as distinct varieties (Salman &Kharusi, 2011).

B. Consonants

In contrast to Sindhi which has 46 consonants (Nihalani, 1995) Lawatiyya has 37 (Table I). Whenever possible, minimal or near minimal pairs are used to establish contrast.

TABLE I

LAWATIYYA CONSONANTS

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar*	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labialized velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d		ʈ ɖ			k g		q		
	pʰ		tʰ		ʈʰ			kʰ				
Affricate						tʃdʒ						
						tʃʰ						
Implosive	ɓ			ɗ		ʄ		ɠ				
Nasal	m			n		ɲ		ŋ				
Trill				r								
Fricative		f		s z		ʃ		x ɣ			ħ ʕ	h
Approximate							j		w			
Lateral Approximate				l								

[Post-alveolar phonemes are retroflex.]

/p/   pənd   'walk'

/b/   bənd   'closed'

/pʰ/   pʰar   'tear (v.)'

/ɓ/   ɓərjo   'it got burnt'

/m/   marwə   'people'

/f/   suf   'apple'

/t/   tər   'fry/float'

/d/   dər   'door'

/tʰ/   tʰəkko 'he got tired'

/ɗ/   ɗənd   'tooth'

/n/   narwə   'rain gutters'

/r/   rəsso   'rope'

/s/   səri   as in "/səripjo/" 'worn out'

/z/   zəri   'metallic thread'

/l/   ləsso   'smooth'

/ʈ/   ʈəkko   'rotten'

/ɖ/   ɖoro   'puddle'

/ʈʰ/   pʊʈʰ   'back (body)'

/ʧ/   ʧari   'she took (something) up'

/ʤ/   ʤiro   'cumin seeds'

/ʧʰ/   ʧʰaI͡   'butter milk'

/ʃ/   ʃari   'net'

/ɲ/   məɲo   'he agreed'

/ʃ/   ʃərab   'alcoholic drink'

/j/   təjar   'ready'

/k/   kər   'do'

/g/   gər   'house'

/kʰ/   kʰən   'take'

/ɗ/   ɗəro   'heavy'

/ŋ/   əŋŋaro   'charcoal'

/x/   xərab   'spoiled/bad'

/ɣ/   ɣərib   'poor person'

/w/   təwar   'sound'

/q/   qəwi   'strong'

/ħ/   ħəbib   'beloved'

/ʕ/   ʕadi   'normal'

/h/   hərjo   'wet'

Some consonants are restricted to borrowings, especially from Arabic and Persian, /x, ɣ, q, ħ, ʕ, z/. Compare /xʊda/ 'God', /kʊɖa/ 'I play'; /ɣərib/ 'poor person', /gəri/ 'she lost weight'; /ħəbib/ 'beloved', /hənd/ 'place'; /ʕadi/ 'normal', /sadi/ 'naïve (f)/ plain'; /zəri/ 'metallic thread', /səri/ 'as in "/səripjo/"'worn out'; /qəb/ 'stick', /ɖəbbo/ 'tin'.

The voiceless plosives and the voiceless affricate have aspirated counterparts: /pʰ, tʰ, kʰ, ʈʰ, ʧʰ/.Compare /kʰən/ 'take', /kən/ 'ear'; /pʊʈʰ/ 'back (body)', /pʊʈ/ 'son'; /ʧʰaɪ͡/ 'butter milk', /ʧaɪ͡/ 'tea'. The post-alveolar stops are retroflex.Similar to Kachchi and unlike Sindhi (Rohra, 1971), Lawatiyya has no aspirated voiced plosives.

Among all Indo-European languages the implosives are found in Sindhi (Khubchandani 1981;Nihalani 1986),and its close relatives. Lawatiyyaconsonantal inventory retains the four implosive stops /ɓ, ɗ, ʄ, ɠ/ found in Sindhi (Nihalani, 1995), whereas sub-varieties of the Kachchi dialect have fewer (Khubchandani, 1981). Compare /ɓərjo/ 'it got burnt', /bərjo/ 'filled'; /ɗoro/ 'thread', /doro/ 'yoghurt'; /ʄari/ 'net', /ʤiro/ 'cumin seeds'; /ɠəro/ 'heavy', /gər/ 'house'.

In contrast to Kachchi, Lawatiyyaalso retains Standard Sindhi non-nasal geminates: /ɖəbbo/ 'tin', /tʰəkko/ 'he got tired', /rəsso/ 'rope'.

C. Vowels

Lawatiyya has a system of ten oral long and short vowels—monophthongs—typical of Indo-Aryan languages: /i, ɪ, e, ɛ, a, ɘ, ə, u, ʊ, o/.

/i/   weʈʰi   'she sat'

/o/   weʈʰo   'he sat'

/ɪ/   ʈɪkko   'dot'

/ə/   ʈəkko   'rotton'

/e/   peʈ   'stomach'

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/ʊ/   pʊʈ   'son'

/ɛ/   nɛ   'and' (contrast: /no/ 'daughter-in-law/fingernail', /nə/ 'no', /na/ 'new (pl.)'

/ə/   ũdər   'rat'

/a/   ũdar   'darkness'

/u/   unu   'deep'

There are also three diphthongs /a͡ɪ, a͡ʊ, ɔ͡ɪ/.

/a͡ɪ/   ʧa͡ɪ   'tea'

/a͡ʊ/   ʧa͡ʊ   'say (v. imp.pl.)

/ɔ͡ɪ/   pɔ͡ɪ   'later'

Eight nasal vowels are also found, including one nasal diphthong. The nasalization of these vowels is contrastive. Compare /sĩ/ 'lion', /si/ 'cold'; /ẽkɛ/'twenty-one', /pekɛ/ 'to the father'; /kʰõsi/ 'she stuffed', /kosi/ 'hot'; /ʧʰã͡ɪ̃/ 'shade', /ʧʰa͡ɪ/ 'butter milk'.

/ĩ/   sĩ   'lion'

/ẽ/   ẽkɛ   'twenty-one'

/ã/   ãkɛ   'to you (pl.)'

/ũ/   ʈũko   'short'

/ɔ̃/   ɔ̃j   'you (pl.)'

/ʊ̃/   ʤʊ̃j   'louse'

/õ/   kʰõsi   'she stuffed'

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/ãĩ/   ʧʰãĩ   'shade'

D. Stress

Word-level stress in Lawatiyya is non-distinctive and falls on the first syllable. In loan words such as those from Arabic, the original stress position is retained. Compare loan word (LW) /ʃəˈmali/ 'north', /ˈlarajo/ 'he took off'; LW /mʊˈsafɪr/ 'traveler', /ˈmarʊkɛ/ 'person's'.

Finally, to illustrate the differences between the three varieties spoken in Oman, Table IIcompares the past participle form of verbs in Lawatiyya, Kachchiand Sindhi, the latter two represented in the manner they were transliterated by Grierson (1919: 190) while the Lawatiyya forms are given as phonemic transcriptions:

TABLE II

COMPARISON OF LAWATIYYA, KACHCHI & SINDHI

English	Lawatiyya	Kachchi	Sindhi
purchase	/ʤɪnjo/	gɪḍō	ggidhō
begin	/ʃʊrukjo/	lɑgō	lɑggō
arrive	/poto/	põtō	pɑhulō
ask	/pʊʧʰakjo/	puchhō	puchhyō
remain	/rəjo/	ryō, reō	rɑhyō
hear	/sʊnjo/	sȭō	suō
stand	/ʊbʈʰo/	ubhō	ubīʈhō

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