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## Buffer Zones and Overlapping Isogloss ‘Fade-out/Fade-in’ Phenomena in the Iranian Linguistic Area

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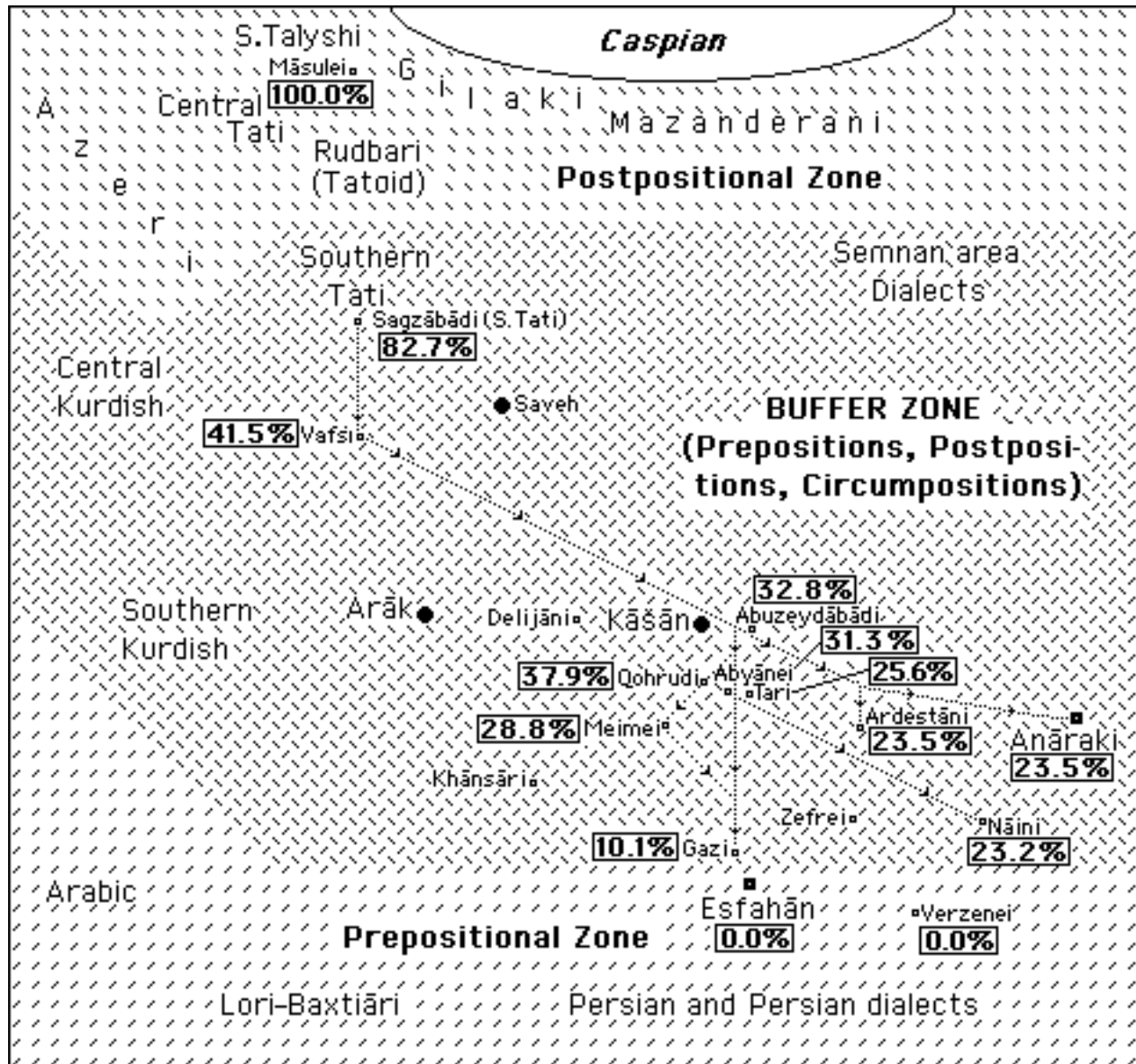
A linguistic buffer zone is formed when two typologically opposite isoglosses meet and overlap. In the overlapping areas, we find both isoglosses in effect simultaneously. In order to accommodate this simultaneity of two opposite patterns, the following typological developments may occur in the buffer zone: (A) split patterns (e.g., both prepositions and postpositions or both N-gen and gen-N), (B) doublets (e.g., the same adposition functions as both preposition and postposition), (C) merged or hybridized patterns (e.g., circumpositions or circumposed genitival expressions that frame the head), and (D) various combinations of all the preceding. I have introduced buffer zone phenomena elsewhere (Stilo 2004) with various patterns — specifically (a) adjective-Head/Head-adjective, (b) genitive-Head/Head-genitive, (c) preposition-Head/Head-postposition — and have also treated adpositions more in depth (Stilo 2006, 1987) and showed that (1) languages of northern Iran are postpositional, that (2) those of southern Iran are prepositional, and that (3) the languages of the buffer zone in central Iran have a wide range of mixed typologies. I will demonstrate the claims made in the present paper by examining the typology of adpositions in more depth within the buffer zone of western Iran.

In this paper I would like to demonstrate that we can say much more about buffer zones than simply stating that they exhibit mixed typologies. My current research has lately been uncovering a very revealing pattern to the areal distribution of these split, doublet, or hybridized patterns. That is, such overlapping buffer zones should not be thought of as necessarily having either abrupt borders or internal uniformity. While the particular typological pattern covered by the isogloss may exhibit an open-ended class in the more consistent areas in the heart of the isogloss (i.e., where postpositions are the usual case and prepositions are non-existent or very rare), the class can become statistically less frequent in the peripheral areas of the isogloss that are within the buffer zone. Or, for instance, there might be a rather frequent use of a limited number of members of the particular class (e.g., only one or two postpositions) in this peripheral zone but the class itself (e.g., postpositions) is no longer open-ended (but the class of prepositions, instead, is). That is, we find a diminishing or “fading out” effect of an isogloss of one typological pattern as its peripheral areas approach the zone where the opposite isogloss is in force. As a complementary phenomenon, however, we can also view the peripheral areas of the isogloss within the buffer zone as the beginning of a simultaneous “fading in” of the opposite isogloss with its role becoming greater as the other isogloss fades out. In the case of adpositional typology, for example, we find a fading out of postpositions on the southern periphery of the postpositional zone. In the overlapping buffer zone area, however, we simultaneously encounter a fading in of prepositions on the northern periphery of the prepositional zone. That is, the peripheral areas of the two isoglosses overlap and thus form the buffer zone between the two opposite, and more consistent, typologies. These fade-out/fade-in phenomena form the main point I wish to make in the paper.

In the proposed paper, I will demonstrate the statistics for the frequency of prepositions, postpositions and circumpositions in the various languages of the buffer zone of central Iran as well as those just to the north and to the south of the buffer zone. These statistics are based on representative samples of spoken narration of approximately eleven minutes in length from various languages within the area taken from Lecoq (2002), Eilers (1979) and Al-e Ahmad (1959). Statistics for Māsulei, north of the buffer zone and exclusively postpositional, and Verzenei, south of the buffer zone and exclusively prepositional — each demonstrating opposite poles with no mixed typology — are also given.

These statistics will then be plotted out onto a map of the buffer zone (see Map One) to show the NW-to-SE cline of postpositional fade-out even though the languages represented in this buffer zone belong to two different subgroups of western Iranian languages, the Tati and Central Plateau Dialect groups. Along this geographic cline, beginning in the north with Southern Tati (Sagzābādi), the northernmost language within the buffer zone, and progressing to the southernmost, Gazi, postpositional typology fades out as we move to the south and southwest (from 82.7% to 10.1% in these two languages respectively). The consistent typology of the prepositional zone begins at about the latitude of the city of Esfahan (Esfahan Jewish, Verzenei: 100%) and remains exclusively prepositional to the south of this line. While Gazi is on the very edge of the postpositional isogloss, the language of the Jews of Esfahan, only 18 kilometers southeast of Gazi — and probably mostly mutually intelligible with it — is still outside the buffer zone and is exclusively prepositional. Other locales on Map One are also known to have mixed adpositional typologies, but not enough naturalistic textual material is available from these languages to enable us to say anything meaningful about the frequency of the various adpositional types. Over 100 other locales speaking these Central Plateau Dialects (Borjian, in press) have been identified, geographically both inside the buffer zone and south of it. More fieldwork must be conducted among these highly endangered languages before we can expand this picture with any more detail than given here. At the same time, however, the high degree of bilingualism with Esfahani Persian in the area is also a huge factor, especially among the younger generation, most likely heavily affecting such subtle issues as adpositional typology as discussed in this paper.

Map One: Frequency of Postpositions in 11-minute spoken texts



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