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The Progressive Tenses with the Verb "to have" as a Peculiar and Exclusive Feature of Western Iranian Dialects Spoken in Modern Iran

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Abstract: The article considers the verb forms with the auxiliary verb "to have" used in Persian and other western Iranian dialects of modern Iran to express a continuous action taking place at the moment of speech in the present or at a certain moment in the past. Drawing upon an extensive material collected from a large number of dialects, the author proves that the geographic area within which these forms are found is limited to the territory of modern Iran, which makes them a distinguishing and exclusive feature of western Iranian (Persian and non-Persian alike) dialects spoken in modern Iran. The author supports the idea that these verb forms are completely "native" to the linguistic area they are found in and, therefore, despite the view-point of some scholars, could not have originated under the influence of western or any other foreign languages.

Keywords: Persian language, Persian dialectology, Iranian dialectology

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Many Western Iranian languages and dialects have verb forms that express an action taking place at a given moment in time in the present or at a certain moment in time in the past. These forms have received various names in Iranian Studies literature, where they are often defined as two special tenses: "present continuous (concrete) tense" and "past continuous (concrete) tense"/ "concrete present" and "concrete past" or "the present and past progressive" (Rastorgueva & Èdel'man 1982: 537-538; cf. Thackston 2009: 204-205), or "periphrastic progressive" (Jeremiás 1993: 99-116). Since, in comparison with the present indicative and past continuous tenses, they are distinguished by a special emphasis on expressing an action in the

process of its implementation (an ongoing action), it would be proper, in my opinion, to also call these forms the "present progressive" and "past progressive" tenses,[1] the terms which we will apply to them in this article, while defining both of them, in the general sense, as "progressive action forms". It should be emphasized that these forms in Western Iranian languages and dialects are considered in Iranian Studies literature as "an innovation" (Rastorgueva & Èdel′man 1982: 538-539), which will be discussed below. This subject has been addressed by several authors in their works: V. A. Žukovskij (1888), A. Z. Rosenfeld (1948), L. S. Pejsikov (1960), M. Pistoso (1974), N. Nematollahi (2014, 2018), I. Dehghan (1972), etc., some of which will be considered in this article. It should also be noted that the present study is primarily dialectological and not typological, though it analyzes some non-dialectological aspects as well. Since a large number of examples collected from numerous published sources are used in this article, it is technically impossible to employ a uniform transcription for the examples from different Iranian languages and dialects. For this reason, examples are quoted in the original transcription of the sources they are cited from with non-substantial modifications, except for the transliteration of the Cyrillic script into Latin.

Progressive action forms are widespread in the Persian, Dari and Tajik languages, including their dialects. In Persian and Dari, they are especially characteristic of informal speech and are practically not found in the official style. In Tajik, these tenses are formed from the unchangeable participle of the notional verb and the personal form of the perfect or past perfect tense of the auxiliary verb *istodan* "to stand, to remain": *karda istodaam* and *karda istoda budam* – first-person singular of the present and past progressive tenses of the verb "to do", etc. (Rastorgueva & Èdel′man 1982: 538-539).[2]

In modern Dari, special complex forms are also used to express the same meaning, which also contain the unchangeable participle of the notional verb. But unlike the Tajik language, the auxiliary verb here is not *istodan*, but *raftan* "to go", which is inflected for person and number. The latter can appear in the present indicative or past tense forms, depending on whether the action it expresses refers to the present moment or to a certain moment in the past: *čerâ larzida mêri*? "why are you trembling?",[3] *tamâm-e šaw Šânâma xânda raftom*… "I read the Shah-nameh all night…" (Farhâdi 1955: 84). At the same time, in Dari, there is also a less common alternative

[1] Thus, unlike the past progressive tense, the past continuous tense in Persian can denote not only an ongoing action but also a repeated action.
[2] Transcription modified.
[3] Here and below examples from the Dari language are given according to the book by A. Farhâdi (1955) in a slightly modified transcription.

progressive action form with the compound verb *râyi* (lit. *râhi*) *budan* instead of the verb *raftan*, identical with the latter in meaning: *dida mêrên = dida râyi'sten*[4] "you see" (Farhâdi 1955: 125). Thus, it can be stated that, despite the fact that Dari and Tajiki use different auxiliary verbs, they are united by a common feature - the notional verb in both is employed in the form of a participle.

In the territory of Iran, in Persian and closely related to them Iranian dialects, progressive action forms for the present and future are also widely used. The difference between them and the above-described ones is that they are composed of the verb *dåštän* "to have" of the relevant tense (present indicative or past absolute) in agreement with person and number, and the personal form (not the participle) of the notional verb, cf. for example, in the Tehrani dialect: *män dåräm mixoräm* "I am eating", *to dåšši* (< *dåšti*) *mixundi* (< *mixåndi*) "you were reading" (Pejsikov 1960: 76, 77).[5]

One of the first European researchers to draw attention to these forms in Persian dialects was V. A. Žukovskij. In the 1880s, he wrote: "*In the Persian colloquial language, as in some modern Persian dialects, the verb داشتن [dåštän], in addition to its usual meaning "to have" ... has a special meaning, which in the literary language ... it does not have*" (Žukovskij 1888: 376).[6] This scholar identified two functions of these tenses: 1) the combination of the aorist of the verb *dåštän*, standing before the notional verb of the present indicative tense, "gives the latter the meaning of such a future tense that must occur immediately; therefore... resembles the present tense with *aller* in French..."; 2) the verb *dåštän* in the past tense "*before the Praeteritum... of another verb, gives the latter the meaning of such a past that has just happened - in French the present tense with venir de...*" (Žukovskij 1888: 376). V. A. Žukovskij gives examples from everyday speech: دارم مِیام [*dåräm miyåm*] "I'll be right there!", داشت رفت بازار [*dåšt räft båzår*] "he just now went to the market" and an example of folk poetry (satire):

اینها همه دُرُس شد حاکم طهران اُروس شد
کُلونل آمد از راه لَمسه پولِس ساز میزنه داره میرقصه.

(Žukovskij 1888: 376-377, also 1902: 250)

Inhå häme doros šod *håkem-e Tehrån orus šod*
Kolunel åmäd äz råh-e Lämse *pules såz mizäne dåre miräghse/miräkhse*

[4] *Râyi'sten < râyi (râhi) + (h)astên*
[5] The original transcription has been slightly modified here and below.
[6] All translations of the quoted material here and below are my own.

"All this came to order:
A Russian became the governor of Tehran,
The colonel came by way of Austria,
The police are playing music (sic),
Are about to dance."

While recognizing V. A. Žukovskij's undoubted merit in that he drew attention to these verb forms at the dawn of research in the field of Persian dialectology, it should be noted that their grammatical meaning was determined by him incorrectly, which was rightly pointed out, in particular, by A. Z. Rosenfeld, who wrote: "*... and the examples given by V. A. Žukovskij in the above-mentioned article should be translated not into the future, but into the present tense... [It is not that] 'I will come now, but I am coming.' The same is true for the following example from popular bazaar satire... 'is dancing (now)', i.e. 'the police are playing and dancing'*" (Rosenfeld 1948: 308).

A. Z. Rosenfeld's view was shared by L. S. Pejsikov. In his monograph on the Tehran dialect, he wrote: "*V. A. Žukovskij noted ... that combinations with* داشتن *[dåštän] have the meaning of the near future ... V. A. Žukovskij's conclusion is too 'broad', although the shade of the near future is sometimes there ... Thus, to the call 'come here' one can respond 'dåräm miyåm'... 'I'll be right there', but in another situation... 'dåräm miyåm dige!' [would mean] 'I'm coming!'...*" (Pejsikov 1960: 77). The example *dåre miraxse*..., L. S. Pejsikov rightly points out, is not interpreted by V. A. Žukovskij quite correctly: not "he is about to dance", but "(he) is dancing". The former author makes the following general conclusion: "*The feature of the verb dåštän noted by V. A. Žukovskij, which, in his opinion, corresponds to the French 'near' past tense of venir de with the infinitive of the conjugated verb, is not confirmed by the conversational examples I recorded, as well as numerous examples from modern literature. V. A. Žukovskij's example* (داشت رفت بازار *[dåšt räft båzår]) is not clear, since dåštän cannot stand before the past absolute/perfective form of an inflected verb at all. In this regard, it was also not possible to find a shade of meaning corresponding to the French Passé antérieur*" (Pejsikov 1960: 78). The general meaning of this verb form in the present tense is defined by L. S. Pejsikov as corresponding to the English present continuous (Pejsikov 1960: 76).
The verb forms described above have attracted the attention of Iranian linguists. Thus, the author of a thorough study on the Birjandi dialect (one of the southern Khorasan dialects of Persian) J̌. Reżāʾī not only denies them the legal right to exist in this dialect, but also believes that they originated in Persian "recently" and under the influence of European (!) languages, and explains their occasional occurrence in the speech of this dialect speakers by the desire to "conform to the norms of the modern Persian language" (Reżāʾī,

1998, 279).[7] This view of the situation is puzzling. Firstly, as N. Nematollahi rightly notes in an article on this topic, such a tense (or progressive construction with the verb "to have") does not exist in any of the foreign languages known to Iranians, including English, French, German and Russian. Rejecting the idea of these constructions being borrowed, she proceeds from the fact that their absence in the indicated languages excludes the possibility of their occurrence in Persian under external influence (Nematollahi 2014: 104, 110). Secondly, these grammatical forms began to be recorded by researchers in the late 19th – early 20th centuries not only in many Persian, i.e. dialects of the southwestern type, but also in northwestern Iranian dialects, and in the so-called "dialects of Central Iran", which share a number of common features with the northwestern ones. At the same time, the researchers who noted these forms at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries collected their materials from among the predominantly illiterate and semi-literate population of Persia at that time, hardly subject to the influence of European languages. Thus, similar constructions are noted by V. A. Žukovskij, whose field research on various dialects dates back to the 80s of the 19th century, and by W. A. Ivanow and D. L. Lorimer in the dialects of the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kerman (see below). The use of this tense in the Mazanderani language is extremely significant. The thesis about the appearance of these verb forms "under the influence of translations from European languages" looks even less convincing against the background of the early recording of their use in northwestern Iranian dialects and in the so-called "dialects of Central Iran" closely related to them. Since a detailed examination of examples is beyond the scope of this work, we will limit ourselves to only a few below.

In addition to the examples of Persian colloquial speech and folklore cited by V. A. Žukovskij above, in which the verb forms in question appear, this

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[7] Original:

واگر اکنون کسی چنین فعلی به کار ببرد و مثلا بگوید «داشتم مرفتم» ... بیگمان زیر تأثیر زبان فارسی کنونی چنین کارواژه‌ای بر زبان خواهد راند، با آن‌که ... در خود زبان فارسی نیز چنین کاربردی تازگی دارد و یقیناً از طریق ترجمه از زبان‌های اروپایی به این زبان راه یافته است. (Reżāʾī, 1998, 279)

Transcription (mine):
vä ägär äknun käs-i čenin feʾl-i be kår bebäräd vä mäsälän beguyäd "dåštom maraftom" bigomän zir-e täʾsir-e zäbän-e fårsi-ye konuni čenin kårvåže-yi bär zäbän xåhäd rånd, bå ān ke … där xod-e zäbän-e fårsi niz čenin kårbord-i tāzegi däräd vä yaqin äz tärigh-e tärjome äz zäbānhā-ye orupāyi be in zäbän räh yäfte-äst.

English translation (mine):
"*If someone today uses such a verb [form], for example says: 'dāštom maraftom'…, then undoubtedly they do so under the influence of the modern Persian language, even though such a usage is also a novelty within Persian itself, and has undoubtedly entered the language through translations from European languages.*"

researcher in the same article notes a similar construction in the reworking of Hafiz's ghazal in the dialect of the village of Kafron near Isfahan. In it, the poet's words: فریاد رسی می آید [*faryādras-ī mīāyad*] “the helper is about to come” correspond to: *feŕyōd-rés-ī dōrū yūe* (Žukovskij 1888: 377). Similar forms are found in the dialect of the village of Sedeh, also located near Ishafan, cf.: *dåtom*[8]*-o šaame* (Rastorgueva & Moškalo 1997: 320) “I walked (at a certain point in time)” and in the dialects of the Jews of Isfahan, judging by the texts published by R. Abrahamian: *Tu fekr därbo, bišti ye ra‘yet dáru älef činive* – “Il était dans ses penseès quand il vit un peysan moissoner son champe” [“he was lost in his thoughts when he saw a peasant collecting grass”] (Abrahamian 1936: 73, 104). A similar tense with a dialectal version of the verb “to have” - *důrtwun* is presented in the dialects of the Zoroastrians of Yazd and Kerman: *me 'důre 'rase* - corresponds to literary Persian: *man dåram miräsäm*, *ta' důri 'rasi - to dåri miräsi*, etc. cf. corresponding past tense forms: *me ’důrte ’rasůde*, *ta ’důrti ’rasůdi*, etc. (Ivanow 1935: 80-81).[9]

The Mazanderani language also has present progressive and past progressive tenses with the same auxiliary verb: *dɔrmɛ nɛvisɛme* “I am writing (now)”, *dɔrni nɛvisɛni* "you are writing", *dɔšti nɛvéšti* “you were writing (at a given time)”, *dɔštɛ nɛvéštɛ* “he was writing”, etc. (Rastorgueva & Èdel′man 1982: 538-539).[10] It should be particularly emphasized that the above examples illustrate the use of these forms not in dialects of the southwestern type, but in northwestern ones (including the so-called “dialects of Central Iran”).

J̌. Reżāʾī's assertion that modern speakers of southern Khorasani dialects (and perhaps even Khorasani dialects in general) in Iran use these constructions “exclusively under the influence of modern Persian” also seems controversial. Thus, describing the features of the Persian dialects of Khorasan at the dawn of the 20th century, W. A. Ivanow wrote: “*Common to colloquial speech all over Persia is the use of the verb dāshtan, in the Present tense for an action in progress: dårä muknä – he is now doing*” (Ivanow 1925: 253). Though, in the Khorasani texts themselves, published by Ivanow, the present author has not found these forms, but this fact should be explained by the peculiarity of the texts themselves - tales and quatrains, while the use of the constructions in question is more characteristic of texts of everyday content, not presented in W. A. Ivanow’s Khorasani materials. However, the very statement of the fact by this outstanding researcher and expert on the dialects of Khorasan, although illustrated by him with a single example, is important evidence of

[8] dåtom < dåštom.
[9] The full paradigm of these forms in the dialects of the Zoroastrians is presented in Rastorgueva & Moškalo (1997: 320).
[10] Transcription slightly changed.

the use of progressive action forms in these dialects, at least already at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

According to my observations, in the modern dialect of the city of Mashhad, the center of the Iranian province of Khorasan, forms such as *derän merän* "they are going/leaving now" are very common. They are also widely represented in stories of everyday content in this dialect, recorded in Arabic alphabet: دِره مِره *dere mere* “he is going”, داشت پیاده مُشُد [*dåšt piyåde mošod*] “he was getting out of the car/bus”, موُ که چِشمام داشت از حدقه مِزَد بیرون [*mu ke češmå-m dåšt az hadaghe mezad birun*] “my eyes [in surprise] bulged out of their sockets”, داشتُم خِفه مُشُدُم [*dåštom xefe mošodom*] “I was suffocating [from the heat]”.[11] An identical form is also registered in the Sistani Persian dialect: *malāng-ā dâra nō mxâra* “malang is also eating food[12]” (Ahangar 2010: 20).[13]

Bakhtiari is another example of the south-western dialects in Iran where the progressive action tense with *dåštän* (*dāsštan*) is recorded, cf. Bavadi dialect: *dāsštom film e-diδ-om* “I was watching a movie” (Taheri-Ardali et. al. 2025: 24).[14] It is significant that these forms, used in numerous southwestern and other Iranian dialects in the territory of modern Iran, are absent from dialects closely related to Persian, outside that country. They are not found even in those of them spoken in northwestern Afghanistan, such as Herati, which is a continuation of the single Khorasani area of Persian dialects. These constructions are not recorded in the Tati dialects of the Caucasus either. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of these tenses with the verb *dåštän* “to have” (in different phonetic variants) is an exclusive feature of the area of Persian and other Western Iranian dialects, that are spoken precisely in the territory of modern Iran, i.e. an isogloss that distinguishes these dialects from the broader spectrum of Iranian languages and dialects, including those belonging to the dialect continuum of closely related southwestern languages – Persian, Dari, and Tajiki.

These forms, as already noted, are considered in the relevant literature as “newly originated/of recent origin”. Such a definition is justified if “recent origin” in this case implies that they occurred in the Persian language and its dialects later than other tenses used in them today, although it is currently impossible to determine how “late” they came into use in the language compared to the present indicative and past continuous tenses with

[11] The stories from which these examples are taken are available on the Internet site: http://www.bechemashad.blogfa.com/category/2/.
[12] Lit. bread.
[13] Transcription modified.
[14] Transcription modified.

the verbal prefix *mī-* (< *hamē*), which are not represented in the language of classical Persian literature either. In the latter, unprefixed verbal forms were employed to express the present action, which in modern language have acquired the function of the subjunctive mood. The fact that tenses with *dåštän* were not recorded in writing until the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries cannot serve as an argument in favor of their absence, if we take into account the extreme conservatism of the literary and official Persian language in the Middle Ages and in the Qajar era, which in no way reflected the tendencies of colloquial speech until the timid attempts to "democratize" Persian literature in the first half of the 20th century. On the other hand, the fact that these forms were recorded in the materials of European researchers as early as the 1880s (i.e., at the dawn of dialectological research) across a wide range of dialects suggests that they must have existed in the language prior to that time. Otherwise, they would not have been able to spread so quickly and take root in the speech of such wide strata of the population, speaking different social and territorial dialects, especially in the conditions of 19th century Persia with a predominantly illiterate population. In other words, it is quite logical to assume that at the time of their written recording, these forms could have already existed in the spoken language for more than one century. At the same time, it cannot be ruled out that their spread (but not their origination) could have been facilitated to a certain extent by the mutual influence of dialects and a certain common supra-dialectal conversational standard (*koine*), which is superimposed in each region on the local dialect and acquires local dialectal features. The influence of such a standard is especially noticeable in cities and regional centers. Perhaps this explains the fact that these forms are more characteristic of the dialects of cities (from Tehran to Kerman and from Shiraz to Mashhad) than of rural settlements, although they are also recorded in the latter. But, as noted above, it would not be correct to explain the appearance of any grammatical form or category in the speech of dialect speakers solely by their desire to "imitate" someone or some standard. The interaction between the supra-dialectal standard and local dialects is a much more complex and organic process, including mutual enrichment and the assimilation by territorial dialects of some common features inherent in the entire set of dialects of the area, features that, when they "fall on the soil of a separate dialect," become its integral part.

These forms or similar ones should have appeared in the language in any case, since they occupy an important niche in the verb system, i.e. a means of expressing an ongoing action at the moment of speech in the present or at a certain point in time in the past, and thus fill the obvious gap in the set of grammatical possibilities for expressing this type of action. The fact that without them this gap would have remained is confirmed not only by the

appearance of forms corresponding in meaning in Dari and Tajik (see above), but also by the occurrence of alternative ways of expressing such an action in some Iranian languages and dialects on the territory of Iran, for example, in Gilaki, Lari and Bandari, which reflects an objective general need for their existence.

In the Gilaki language, progressive action forms are constructed by combining the infinitive of the notional verb with the personal form of the insufficient verb “to be, to stay”, outwardly very similar to the verb “to have”: *nivištən dərəm* “I am writing”, *nivištən dəri* “you are writing”, *nivištən dərə* “he, she is writing”, etc. At the same time, the past tense is represented by two variants: *nivištən dərə bum/nivištən dubum* “I was wroting”, *nivištən dərə bim/nivištən dibim* “we were writing”, *nivištən dərə bid/nivištən dibid* “you were writing”, etc. ((Rastorgueva & Èdel′man 1982: 538).

In the Lari language/dialect, forms with the same meaning are derived from the infinitive by lengthening the final vowel *a*, the preverb *a-* and personal endings: *a-dedå-y* “he sees”, *a-gotå-en ke* “they say that …”, etc.[15] M. S. Pelevin has recorded similar constructions formed from the past participle by means of the prefix *a-* and personal endings in the Bandari dialect of southern Iran: *me kār akerdum* “I am working now” (Pelevin 1998: 116).

Noting that attempts to discover the source of such constructions with the verb "to have" in Old and Middle Iranian, as well as in foreign languages, were unsuccessful, N. Nematollahi puts forward in the aforementioned article a hypothesis of their possible origin on the basis of the Persian language itself. And although this hypothesis is not without flaws and may raise questions (see below), the idea underlying it that these tenses were a consequence of the natural evolution of the lexical and grammatical means of the Persian language itself and the further development of their potential, represents a certain achievement. N. Nematollahi draws attention to the fact that a distinctive feature of these constructions, in addition to the use of a specific auxiliary verb “to have”, is the use of personal forms of both the auxiliary and notional verb (both are inflected for person and number). This feature, this author believes, distinguishes them from the resultative-stative or perfective tenses, where only the auxiliary verb (or copula) get inflected,[16] and from constructions with an apocopated infinitive (Nematollahi 2014: 110).

[15] Cf. also Romaskevič (1945: 50).

[16] This, as has been noted earlier, is the difference between constructions with the verb "to have" in the Persian language and from progressive action forms similar in grammatical meaning in Dari and Tajiki.

N. Nematollahi puts forward a hypothesis about a possible connection between the progressive action forms and the so-called "Serial Verb Constructions" in which a sequence of two or more verbs is presented, functioning as a single predicate and describing a single event, specifically, combinations of the verb *bär-dåštän* with another, of which the first is something like a marker of the beginning of an action.[17] N. Nematollahi gives examples from the Persian language: *bär-dårim berävim…* "let us set off", lit. "take [and] go…", *in bud ke ånhå… bär-dåštänd telegråf kärdänd* "then they… set off", lit. "took [and] telegraphed", *be färängihå näguyid ke bär-dåränd… benevisänd*[18] "don't tell foreigners, or they (will) set off", lit., "take… write" etc. (Nematollahi 2014: 111-112). The above author suggests that in the process of grammaticalization of this serial verb construction with *bär-dåštän*, the latter could lose the preverb *bär-*, taking on the abbreviated form: *dåštän*. Its original semantics: an indication of an imminent action, was extended to other grammatical functions, more importantly denoting an ongoing action, which gradually became its main function (Nematollahi 2014: 112).

In the opinion of the present writer, at least two questions can be raised in connection with the described theory, which undoubtedly has the right to exist as a hypothesis, especially for lack of more convincing alternatives. Firstly, if the forms with *dåštän* go back to the serial verb construction with *bär-dåštän*, then how can one explain their use in those Iranian languages or dialects (for example, northwestern, see above), in which the verb *bär-dåštän* is absent or does not indicate an upcoming action? Secondly, among the Persian examples cited by N. Nematollahi, phrases with the verb *bär-dåštän* in the imperative and subjunctive moods are prevalent: *bär-dårim berävim…, bär-dåränd… benevisänd*. In light of the considered hypothesis, how can one explain the fact that the progressive action forms with *dåštän* are used exclusively in the indicative mood?

The main conclusions of the present study can be summarized as follows. The use of the analyzed tenses (constructions) with the verb *dåštän* "to have" in different dialectal and phonetic variants is an exceptional feature of the area of Persian and some other Western Iranian dialects, the distribution of which is limited to the territory of modern Iran. These temporal forms were a consequence of the natural evolution of the lexical and grammatical means of expression of the Persian language itself, and their origin cannot be explained by the "influence of foreign languages." As an integral and organic part of the Persian verb system, these constructions fill an important grammatical niche, i.e. a means of expressing an ongoing present or past

[17] Cf. similar combinations with the verb "take" in Russian: *ja vzjal i skazal…*, lit. "I took and said…"
[18] Transcription modified.

action. These forms are widespread within the entire geographical realm of Persian and other Western Iranian dialects of northern, central, southern and eastern Iran.

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