The Pronunciation Presentation Pattern of Entries in *Borhān-i Qāti':*

Some Useful Implications

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Abstract

Among the authoritative dictionaries of Persian language, *Borhān-i Qāti'* (lit. 'Conclusive Proof') is considered a turning point in the field of dictionary production, and it provides attractive data for applied linguistics studies in the field of lexicography. *Borhān-i Qāti'*, compiled in India in the 17th century by Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Khalaf Tabrīzī, is remarkable in several respects, but one of its features which does not seem to have received a proper attention, is its method of providing the pronunciation of its entries. In this reference, almost half of the entries have been given a pronunciation based on analogy, in which the entry word is echoed with a second-well known one, having the same phonotactics (distribution and arrangement of vowels and consonants), and distribution of vowels, and prosody pattern. This method was successfully practiced later on in another important but unfinished reference: *Āsaf al-Loghāt* (1906-1921). In This article, this pattern of presenting pronunciation is introduced and explained. Also it provides the readers with a list of the reference words which have been used to recognize the pronunciation of the other words, and the frequency of them will also be given and

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analyzed. The final list of this article presents those words which were believed to be "basic" or "core" by the compiler of *Borhān-i Qāti'*.

Keywords: *Borhān-i Qāti',* lexicography, Persian, analogy, dictionary.

1. Introduction

Borhān-e Qāṭeʿ (literally *"Conclusive Proof"*) is the title of a renowned Persian dictionary from the 11th/17th century, compiled by Moḥammad-Ḥosayn b. Ḵalaf Tabrīzī, who used the pen name *Borhān*. He completed the work in 1062/1652. Little is known about the compiler, including the dates of his birth and death. What is certain is that he was originally from Tabrīz and, like many other scholars of his era, migrated to India, settling in the Deccan. He spent some time in the service of Sultan ʿAbd-Allāh Qoṭbšāh (r. 1036–83/1626–72), the seventh ruler of the Shiʿite dynasty of Golconda, and dedicated his dictionary to him.

The work contains an introduction (*Dibāče*) in nine sections, each called *Fāyede* ("use"), followed by the main body of the dictionary in 29 chapters, termed *Goftār* ("sayings"). The dictionary is arranged in strict alphabetical order, making it far more accessible than its predecessors. Each *Goftār* is further divided into subsections known as *Bayān*. Since the compiler claimed that his dictionary encompassed the most significant earlier lexicons, *Borhān-e Qāṭeʿ* is notable for both the number of its entries and the breadth of information it provides.

A distinctive feature of the work lies in its method of recording pronunciation. For nearly half of the entries, pronunciation is explained through phonotactic and prosodic analogy. In this approach, the target entry is paired with a second, well-known word that shares the same phonotactic pattern and vowel distribution. This method was employed alongside the traditional system of indicating diacritical marks (*ḥarakāt*) for individual letters.

The wide range of lexical items and compounds, coupled with the rise of printing, contributed to the popularity of *Borhān-e Qāṭeʿ* from the time of its compilation. Its manuscripts were widely reproduced in both India and Iran, and the dictionary was extensively used by linguists and poets. It also served as the foundation for later Persian dictionaries, such as *Farhang-e Anjomanārā-ye Nāṣerī*, *Farhang-e Ānand Rāj*, *Farhang-e Nafīsī* by Reżāqolī Khan Hedāyat, and the works of Moḥammad Pādšāh and Nāẓem-al-Aṭebbāʾ Nafīsī.

Nevertheless, the dictionary did not escape criticism. Later scholars accused the compiler of misleading lexicographers and encouraging poets and intellectuals to employ erroneous words. Among its shortcomings are the inclusion of Pahlavi heterograms (*hozvāreš*) labeled as "Zand and Pāzand" that are no longer used in Persian, some with incorrect etymologies; the incorporation of spurious *Dasātīr* words; the absence of poetic examples for many entries; historical and geographical entries containing obvious errors; fabricated personal and family names; and the presentation of myths and superstitions as factual material.

Although *Borhān-e Qāṭeʿ* was published multiple times in Calcutta, Bombay, and Tehran, the most reliable version remains the critical edition prepared in Tehran by Moḥammad Moʿīn, first published in 1330 Š./1951 in four volumes and later expanded to five volumes in 1342 Š./1963.

The present article examines in detail the unique system devised by Borhān to record the pronunciation of words in his Persian dictionary.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 A Short History of Lexicography around the World

The Akkadians were the first civilization to compile a bilingual dictionary, dating back to 2300 BC. Their primary aim was to facilitate communication with speakers of other languages. Thus, the earliest dictionaries were bilingual, created mainly as tools for cross-linguistic understanding.

By 300 BC, however, the first monolingual dictionary, the *Erya* of China, appeared. Although its authorship remains uncertain, many scholars have attributed it to Confucius. The *Erya* was organized thematically and sought to explain difficult terms, particularly those in religious and literary contexts. Around the same period, Philitas of Cos compiled the *Dictionary of Disorderly Words* in Greek, which explained rare and obscure Homeric terms.

The first European monolingual dictionary was published in Spanish in 1611 by Sebastián de Covarrubias. His work became the model for later lexicographical efforts in Britain and France. The earliest English dictionary, *A Table Alphabeticall* (1604) by Robert Cawdrey, contained 2,543 entries. In 1755, Samuel Johnson produced *A Dictionary of the English Language*, the first comprehensive and authoritative English dictionary. Alphabetically arranged and comprising 42,773 entries, it included illustrative quotations to demonstrate word usage. Johnson's dictionary became the

standard reference until the monumental *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) appeared in 1928, a project that required 44 years of dedicated effort.

2.1.1 A Brief Historical Overview of Pronunciation in English Dictionaries

In early dictionaries, pronunciation was not typically indicated, largely because in many languages there was a straightforward correspondence between orthography and pronunciation. In languages such as Spanish, Swahili, and Finnish, accurate spelling alone was generally sufficient to convey pronunciation.

In English lexicography, the earliest attempts to include pronunciation relied on conventional spelling systems supplemented with diacritical marks. Over time, these were replaced by systematic phonetic notations, culminating in the adoption of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, English dictionaries rarely marked pronunciation, though a few scholars across Britain studied the relationship between spelling and sound. Some even compared English phonetics to those of other languages; for example, English words were transcribed using Welsh spelling conventions.

The IPA, proposed by the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (1860–1943), was officially established in 1888 after two years of development (Lewis & Mees, 2017). Its adoption marked a turning point in standardizing the representation of pronunciation in dictionaries worldwide.

2.2 A Short History of Persian Lexicography

The tradition of dictionary-making in Iran is very ancient, dating back nearly two millennia. The official language of the Achaemenid Empire was Old Persian, which gradually transitioned into Middle Persian (Pahlavi) at the same time that Avestan, the sacred language of Zoroastrianism, was also undergoing linguistic change. As the language of the *Avesta* became increasingly difficult for the general population to understand, efforts were made to translate, explain, and interpret its vocabulary. Thus, the earliest attempts at Persian lexicography were motivated by religious needs, aiming to clarify difficult words in the holy text.

One such work is the *Oim Dictionary*, dating back to around 700 BC, critically edited by Martin Haug. Another significant example is the *Pahlavi Dictionary*, critically edited by H. F. J. Junker, which contains both thematic and lexical entries. This dictionary functioned as a bilingual *Avesta–Pahlavi* thesaurus (Assi, 2021).

With the advent of Islam in Iran, lexicographical activities shifted focus. Many Iranian scholars, motivated by religious concerns, compiled Arabic–Persian bilingual dictionaries, particularly in Khorasan. Later, under new political and linguistic conditions marked by the rise of local dynasties and a sense of cultural nationalism, New Persian gained prominence. As Dari Persian spread across central and western Iran along with its flourishing literature, the need for Persian dictionaries grew, both to teach the language and to preserve its literary richness.

The earliest surviving Persian dictionary is *Loḡat-e Fors* ("Persian Words"), compiled by Asadi Ṭusi between 445–452 AH. Although there is no consensus on the exact number of its entries, it is estimated to include around 3,000. The work was primarily intended as a tool for poets, particularly for finding rhymes.

2.2.1 Evolution of Persian Lexicography in India

Persian lexicography flourished in India alongside the expansion of Persian literary patronage in royal courts, most of which were ruled by Turkic-speaking dynasties such as the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. Between 1300 and 1900, numerous dictionaries were compiled, many of them arranged alphabetically.

During the first three centuries of this tradition, Indo-Persian lexicographers mainly sought to preserve and expand upon the inventories of their prestigious Iranian and Indian predecessors. Their works enabled readers to engage with Persian literature, though some lexicographers also demonstrated philological insight and contributed fragments of otherwise unknown poetry, such as verses attributed to Rudaki.

A more critical era of lexicography began under the Mughal emperor Akbar I and the Safavid king ʿAbbās I. During this period, Safavid poets and scholars fleeing to India helped shape Persian as a vibrant and flexible language with multiple stylistic standards.

Among the notable works of this era is Jamāl-al-Dīn Ḥosayn Enju Šīrāzī's *Farhang-e Jahāngīrī*, compiled in two editions (1608 and 1622) with approximately 10,000 entries. The dictionary, arranged alphabetically by the second letter, became widely known simply as *Farhang*. Another significant contribution was Moḥammad-Qāsem Sorūrī Kāšānī's *Majmaʿ al-Fors* (also called *Farhang-e Sorūrī*), which critically evaluated 53 earlier dictionaries. Sorūrī produced two editions (1599 and 1618) before migrating from Isfahan to the Mughal court.

Perhaps the most famous and controversial Persian dictionary produced in India was *Borhān-e Qāṭeʿ* ("The Conclusive Proof"), compiled by Moḥammad-Ḥosayn

Khalaf Tabrīzī, known by the pen name *Borhān*. While innovative in many respects—offering simple, precise definitions, synonyms and antonyms, and a wide range of entries—it was also criticized for including unreliable and erroneous material. The work essentially synthesized *Farhang-e Jahāngīrī* and *Farhang-e Sorūrī*, but Borhān eliminated the poetic examples, arranged the entries strictly alphabetically by initial, and added numerous words and compounds. The dictionary contains approximately 20,211 entries (estimates vary between 19,060 and 20,215 across editions).

Borhān himself stated that his sources included four earlier dictionaries: *Farhang-e Jahāngīrī* by Jamāl-al-Dīn Ḥosayn Enju Širāzī (completed 1017/1608), *Majmaʿ al-Fors* by Moḥammad-Qāsem Sorūrī Kāšānī, *Sorma-ye Solaymānī* by Taqī Awḥadī, and *Ṣeḥāḥ al-adwiya* by Ḥosayn Anṣārī (d. 806/1403). However, many additional references must also have been used, as his dictionary contains words of non-Persian origin—including Avestan, Khwarezmian, Sogdian, and regional dialects such as Sīstānī, Kermānī, Gīlakī, and Ṭabarī—some of which appear to have been labeled incorrectly. Borrowings from Hebrew, Syriac, Turkish, Greek, Latin, and several Indian languages (especially Dakanī) also appear. In addition, the work contains a large number of historical, geographical, and proper names, which must have been derived from other, often unidentified, sources.

By the nineteenth century, as Persian gradually gave way to Urdu, the British removed Persian as the official administrative language in 1834, which significantly diminished Persian lexicographical activity in India.

2.2.2 Pronunciation in Persian Dictionaries

Solṭānī (1386/2007) considers information about pronunciation to be a fundamental feature of dictionaries, as essential as alphabetical arrangement and the inclusion of compounds. She identifies several methods employed by Persian lexicographers to represent pronunciation:

1. Analogy with a more familiar word. In this method, the pronunciation of a less common word is explained through comparison with a more widely known one that shares the same phonotactic structure. For instance, /zendān/ is explained by analogy with /penhān/, and /band/ by analogy with /pand/. Importantly, this system of "words on the same measure" is distinct from poetic prosody. In lexicography, both vowel quality and consonant–vowel arrangement must match, whereas in

Persian prosody syllable weight and vowel length are crucial. For example, in prosody /a/, /u/, and /i/ are considered long vowels, so /bu/ and /ba/ scan the same metrically, though in old Persian lexicography they are treated as distinct.

2. Explicit description of vowels and consonants. Some dictionaries indicate pronunciation by describing the vowel following an initial consonant:

- *be kasr-e x*: consonant + /e/, as in /fe/

- *be fatḥ-e x*: consonant + /a/, as in /fa/

- *be sokun-e x*: consonant without a following vowel

- *be xafāy-e h*: /h/ is silent, as in /barre/ ("lamb")

- *be ẓohur-e h*: /h/ is pronounced, as in /bezeh/ ("crime")

An example of a dictionary entry employing this method is illustrated in the following excerpt:

آهمند با های موقوف و میم مفتوح
بنون زده ، کسی را گویند که دروغ
گوید ، تا مردم را فریب دهد۲ ، وآنرا
آسمند نیز نامند . صاحب فرهنگِ
منظّمِ مهر است :

آهمند با های موقوف و میم مفتوح بنون زده، کسی را گویند که دروغ گوید، تا مردم را فریب دهد و آنرا آسمند نیز نامند.

The example indicates that the word /āhmand/ has consists of /h/ connected to /m/ without any vowel joining these two consonants together as well as /m/ followed by /a/ which follows /n/ respectively. Then it defines the word as someone who lies in order to deceive people. Finally, this entry provides the readers with another word /āsmand/ as another alternative word form with the same meaning.

3. The last group of Persian lexicographers used their own inventions to show pronunciation, for example, signs similar to those of the old Avestan script are used to show phonotactics in the *Farhang-e Nezām*.

حروف اعراب از اوستا وغیره

فتحه و همزه مفتوحه (ـمـ)   ضمه و همزه مضمومه (ـُ)   کسره و همزه مکسوره (ـِ)   آ (ـسـ)

واو اعرابی (ـو)   یاء اعرابی (ـی)

The first symbol on the right of the picture depicts /a/ sound which is a frequent vowel in Persian, the second symbol signifies /o/ as another frequent vowel in Persian, the third symbol identifies /e/ as another frequent vowel in Persian, and finally the symbol on the left of the picture depicts /ā/ as another frequent vowel in Persian.

Below one instance of the presentation of entry information using this pattern has been illustrated:

The entry introduces پاافشردن /pā. afšordan/ transcribed by the same symbols used above to depict vowels first, then it defines the word in three subparts containing concrete meaning, metaphoric meaning, as well as its use as metonymy.

2.3 Research on *Borhān-i Qāti'*

Early research on *Borhān-i Qāti'* has highlighted both its significance and its shortcomings. Da'i al-Islam (1362/1983) argued that, like many dictionary compilers, Khalaf Tabrizi did not spend decades creating an original dictionary; rather, he aimed to consolidate words from existing dictionaries into a single volume. Da'i al-Islam considered the post-*Borhān* Persian literature to contain many errors, suggesting that the dictionary itself suffers from fundamental flaws. He questioned why *Borhān-i Qāti'* was repeatedly reprinted while Jamangiri's *Farhang* saw only one or two editions, attributing its popularity to the convenience of alphabetical arrangement.

Dabir-Siyaghi (1368/1989) noted that *Borhān-i Qāti'* has been subject to more criticism than most other dictionaries because of its mix of strengths and weaknesses. He identified *tahrīf* (semantic deviation) and *tashīf* (distortion) as primary flaws and, citing Mo'in (1376/1997), observed that the removal of poetic examples was a significant disadvantage. Dabir-Siyaghi argued that this omission allowed the inclusion of more entries in the dictionary.

Jovini (1382/2003) remarked that while some scholars, such as Qazvini, recognized the analogy-based corrections in *Borhān-i Qāti'*, they did not fully trust the dictionary. Mo'in (2005/1384), citing Nafisi, criticized the dictionary for numerous complex combinations and word formations.

Mansouri (1388/2009, 1390/2011) argued that although Tabrizi generally avoided Arabic words, exceptions occurred in the form of certain compounds. He identified misreadings of earlier poetic collections (*Divāns*) as the source of erroneous word formations, which were then perpetuated in subsequent dictionaries. Mansouri (1389/2010) also noted that *Borhān-i Qāti'* imported many words and compounds from earlier dictionaries, particularly *Farhang-e Jahāngiri*, sometimes introducing new meanings or correcting errors in the original entries. As a result, Mansouri considered *Borhān-i Qāti'* a valuable tool for revising earlier works.

Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari and Salimian (1393/2014) identified 380 entries in which detailed explanations were absent, yet the words were considered *ma'ruf* ("well-known").

3. Theoretical Considerations

3.1 Cognitive Foundations of Analogy

Analogical cognition is the ability to detect, process, and learn from relational similarities. Key components include (Gentner & Medina, 1998; Gentner & Colhoun, 2010):

1. **Retrieval:** Accessing a base representation from long-term memory.

2. **Alignment, Highlighting Relations, and Inference Projection:** Establishing correspondences between elements of base and target representations.

3. **Evaluation:** Applying criteria to assess the results of analogical mapping.

4. **Schema Abstraction:** Abstracting relational schemas through comparison (Gick & Holyoak, 1983; Gentner, 2005).

5. **Re-representation and Progressive Alignment:** Modifying representations during comparison to improve alignment.

3.2 Crucial Factors in Pronunciation

Pronunciation is governed by the interplay of segmental and suprasegmental features. Prosody, combined with other linguistic and non-linguistic cues, enables speakers to reconstruct meaning. Key components include:

- **Prosody:** Rhythm (syllable stress) and intonation (melody of speech).

- **Stress:** Relative force applied to syllables; stressed syllables are stronger than unstressed ones (Crystal, 2008: 454).

- **Rhythm:** Loosely structured temporal patterning of speech (Noteboom, 1997).

- **Intonation:** Rising or falling pitch patterns conveying meaning.

In Persian lexicography, when a word X is described as "on the same measure as" Y, both its phonotactic (segmental) and suprasegmental features match Y.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Technical Features of *Borhān-i Qāti'*

Key characteristics include:

- Strict alphabetical arrangement of entries.

- Consolidation of multiple previous dictionaries into one volume.

- Inclusion of numerous new words and compounds, particularly medical terms.

- Pronunciation indicated by analogy for nearly half of the entries; each entry is paired with a familiar word sharing phonotactics and vowel distribution (*X bar vazn-e Y*). This method was later adopted in *Āsaf al-Loghāt* (1906–1921).

- Total entries: 19,060–20,215.

- Sources include Iranian dialects, Arabic, Turkish, Syriac, Greek, Latin, and Indian languages.

- 274 Pahlavi heterograms.

- Various vocalizations, with some issues in proper nouns.

4.2 Record Holders (Preliminary Statistics)

- 9,309 words introduced by "measures."

- 4,557 words used as "measures."

- Frequency distribution (examples): 2,822 words once, 75 words six times, 1 word 33 times.

4.3 Patterns of Choosing Measures

- Examples include:

    - Words used 10–15 times: ... «بغداد»، «پیچیدن»، «چراغ»

    - Words used >20 times: «اردک»، «سمند»، «فرزند».

- Entries illustrate different patterns:

    - Simple words introducing simple words: ۷۱ :آهو (بر وزن کاهو), حیوان معروف

    - Simple words introducing non-simple words: ۷۷۴ :خندان (بر وزن دندان), شکفتگی

    - Non-simple words introducing simple words: ۷۸ :ابدام (بر وزن بدنام), جسم

    - Non-simple words introducing non-simple words: تیربند (بر وزن ریشـخند), کمـر
    بافته از پشم شتر: ۵۴۲

    - Proper nouns introducing general nouns, general nouns introducing proper nouns, and proper nouns introducing proper nouns.

- Rhyming examples: ۱۵۱۹ :قبیله (بر وزن طویله), جماعتی که از یک پدر باشند

- Entries across different parts of speech are also represented.

4.4 Interesting Cases

- Phonotactic alternations: xwi> xi, xwâ> xâ

    ▬ ایشان (بر وزن خویشان)، ضمیر جمع: ۱۹۷

    ▬ آبگاه (بر وزن خوابگاه)، تیهگاه و پهلو: ۱۰

    ▬ بالانیدن (بر وزن خوابانیدن)، حرکت دادن: ۲۲۵

    ▬ پازش (بر وزن خواهش)، وجین: ۳۵۲

- Vowel alternations: ē=i

    ▬ بیخستن (بر وزن دل بستن)، درماندن: ۳۳۲

    ▬ پیازی (بر وزن حجازی)، نوعی لعل قیمتی: ۴۳۴

- Some semantic measures:

    ▬ امرود، بر وزن و معنی امروت است، میوهای معروف: ۱۶۱

    ▬ باراب، بر وزن و معنی فاراب، ناحیه مشهور: ۲۱۴

- Other notable cases include lexical and proper nouns, rhyming patterns, and unusual phonetic structures.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Phonetic Implications of Pronunciation in *Borhān-i Qāti'*

In the absence of a standardized transcription system, the lexicographer of *Borhān-i Qāti'* relied, perhaps unconsciously, on the human cognitive apparatus. Analogy plays a central role in cognition, serving as a basis for categorization and imitation. Words that share the same prosodic weight and phonotactic structure are perceived as more similar than different.

The compiler sought to minimize differences, using both linear and non-linear similarities to indicate pronunciation. **Linear similarities** refer to similarities in phonotactics, while **non-linear similarities** refer to similarities in intonation and rhythm. Two main factors likely motivated this method:

1. Lack of mastery of transliteration systems and unavailability of an international transcription alphabet.

2. In Persian, vowels are often unmarked and unspecified in writing.

The words used as reference for pronunciation were probably among the most frequently used words at the time, reflecting linguistic norms and providing a foundation for historical sociolinguistic analysis. Importantly, these reference words were native Persian words, not foreign borrowings, creating a self-reinforcing system.

This approach facilitated the memorization of new or unfamiliar words by grouping them into prosodic categories with shared linear and non-linear features. The lexicographer acted akin to a designer of a linguistic "game," selecting rhythmically similar words to establish high-frequency patterns and determining the pronunciation of exceptional cases based on common usage. By including such information, *Borhān-i Qāti'* encodes both segmental and suprasegmental features of Persian, allowing researchers to access typological and phonological information directly from dictionary entries.

5.2 Basic Persian Vocabulary According to *Borhān-i Qāti'*

Analysis of frequency patterns shows that certain words served as primary reference points for pronunciation, indicating their prominence during the time of compilation:

- One word, 23 times: «مفلوک»

- Three words, 24 times: «چمن»، «رسیدن»، «هلاک»

- One word, 26 times: «پلنگ»

- Highest record, one word, 33 times: «فرزند»

It should be noted that semantic considerations did not influence the selection of reference words. Occasionally, very colloquial or even rude words were used as measures for neutral or respected words.

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