



## ЯЗЫКОВЫЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ

## LANGUAGE PROCESSES

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## THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF ARRANAJI

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**Abstract**

In this article, we examine an Iranian secret language based on the regional Tati language. We investigate the specific features of this professional argot, known as Arranaji or Qarqadili, which is common in the villages of northwestern Iran where Tati dialects are spoken. This secret language was traditionally used by seasonal workers engaged in cutting and processing wood in the urban centers of northern Iran, particularly in the Gilan and Mazandaran regions.

We identify the distinctive characteristics of Arranaji, which is based on the Tati dialects of the villages of Karnaq and Lerd but employs a substitute lexicon that differs significantly from standard Tati vocabulary. The woodcutters and carpenters who used Arranaji – men who lived apart from their home communities for extended periods within a closed male environment – developed a euphemistic vocabulary and coded expressions related to their professional activities, gender roles, drugs, and sociocultural taboos and prohibitions.

This linguistic variety existed solely in oral form and had never been previously documented. Through our fieldwork, we analyze its vocabulary, explore the reasons for the emergence of this argot and its linguistic properties, and examine its use within the community, its geographical distribution, primary functions, as well as its professional and gender-specific characteristics. Additionally, we discuss the etymology and significance of the names Arranaji and Qarqadili.

Finally, we address the reasons for the decline of the original professional functions and gender restrictions of this secret language under contemporary conditions, and its continued use as a familial code to keep information hidden from outsiders and children.

**KEYWORDS:** Iranian languages, Tati language, Tati Khalkhal, Arranaji, Qarqadili, secret language, argot, pidgin

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## СЕКРЕТНЫЙ ЯЗЫК АРРАНАДЖИ

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### Аннотация

В статье рассматривается разновидность ираноязычного секретного языка, основанная на региональном языке тати. Изучается специфика этого профессионального варианта речи, известной как арранаджи, или каркадили, распространенного в деревнях северо-западного Ирана, где говорят на диалектах тати. Этот секретный язык использовался сезонными рабочими-отходниками, связанными с рубкой и обработкой дерева в городских центрах северных регионов Ирана, в Гиляне и Мазандеране.

Мы выявляем специфику секретного языка арранаджи, основанного на диалектах тати деревень Карнак и Лерд, но применяющего замещающий лексикон, отличный от словаря собственно тати. Используя арранаджи дровосеки и плотники, проживавшие в отрыве от родных мест в закрытом мужском сообществе, выработали эвфемистическую табуированную лексику, связанную с их профессиональной жизнью, ее гендерными особенностями, наркотиками, а также социокультурными запретами.

Данная языковая разновидность существовала только в устной форме и никогда ранее не подвергалась документированию. Мы анализируем выявленный нами в ходе полевой работы специфический словарь, раскрываем причины создания арранаджи и особенности его употребления в сообществе, области его распространения и основные функции, а также профессиональную и гендерную специфику и происхождение названий арранаджи и каркадили.

Раскрываются причины утраты в современных условиях изначальных профессиональных функций и гендерных ограничений секретного языка и использование его как семейного для сохранения информации в тайне от посторонних и детей.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** иранские языки, диалекты тати, тати Халхала, арранаджи, каркадили, секретный язык, арг, жаргон, пиджин

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## 1 | Introduction

Iranian languages and dialects are one of the important branches of Indo-European languages [Stilo, 2018: 660]. The Iranian languages were the languages of the Aryan group of Indo-European people who separated from the main body of related people around the third millennium BC and settled in the plains of Central Asia and in Iran [Rezaee Baghbidi, 2009: 9]. According to traditional classification of Iranian languages one of these is the northwestern branch<sup>86</sup>. This branch, which is common in a large part of the north, west, and northwest of Iran and adjacent areas outside Iran [Sabzalipour, 2010; Safarzadeh, 2003], includes many languages, such as Mazandarani, Talyshi, Gilaki, Balochi, Semnani, Tati, as well as extinct Azeri (of Iranian origin [Asadi, Bagheri Hariry, Kiyani, 2014: 569]).

Tati (endonym *Tāti*, Persian *Tāti* (تاتی)) is a group of Northwestern Iranian Tatic dialects [Stilo, 2018: 660]. They are spoken sporadically in the Northwestern highlands of Iran. Several groups of Tati vernaculars are known, all of them have been subject to several stages of endangerment. These vernaculars were intensively Turkicized during the past centuries, and in recent decades their native speakers are actively shifting to Persian. The younger generations do not learn Tati as a mother tongue because in Iran the language of media and education is exclusively Persian, and families tend to speak Persian with their children to facilitate their education at school (data from the authors' long-term fieldwork, 2020–2024)<sup>87</sup>.

A variety of Tati dialects is prevalent in the following areas of Iran [Yarshater, 1970: 451–454; Sabzalipour, 2010; 2011; 2012; 2015; Sabzalipour, Izadifar, 2014]:

1. Areas in the southwest of Qazvin: including Takestani, Shali, Khiyaraji, Ebrahim-abadi, Sagsabadi, Danesfani, Esfarovarini and Khoznini varieties [Yarshater, 1969: 17–18].
2. Eshtehard Karaj [Yarshater, 1969: 17–18].
3. Khalkhal: including Askestani, Asboi, Deravi<sup>88</sup>, Kolori, Shali, Dizi, Karini, Kehali, Lardi, Gilavani, Taharamdashti varieties in Shahroud section and Kajali and Karnaqi varieties in

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. new classification by Agnes Korn (Korn, Agnes. 2016. A partial tree of Central Iranian: A new look at Iranian subphyla. *Indogermanische Forschungen*. 121 (1). 401–434. 10.1515/if-2016-0021. halshs-01333448v4; Korn, Agnes. 2019. Isoglosses and subdivisions of Iranian. *Journal of Historical Linguistics*. 19/2, Oct 2019. 239–281 <https://doi.org/10.1075/jhl.17010.kor>) that is described in the article [Ivanov, Dodykhudoeva, present issue]. (прим. ред.)

<sup>87</sup> Cf. also other Tati vernaculars, such as the Upper Taromi variety, also an endangered indigenous language of Iran – thought to be used as a first language by adults only, and not taught in schools (Ethnologue) – and Takestani, considered potentially vulnerable in (UNESCO WAL).

<sup>88</sup> Dərav is a mountainous village located in the Shahrud area of Khalkhal district south of Ardebil province in the Northwest of Iran. Here live about 300 families, all of whom speak Tati as their mother tongue. Most villagers are familiar with Persian and most elders speak the Turkic vernacular that is common in the nearby town of Khalkhal. However, today



Khorsrostan section [Yarshater, 1959; Sabzalipour, 2010; Asadi, Bagheri Hariry, Kiyani, 2014: 569; Sabzalipour, Izadifar, 2025].

4. Zanzan: in Khoyn, sixty kilometers southwest of Zanzan province and Upper Tarom (including Nokiani, Siavarudi, Hazarrudi, Jamalabadi and Bakoluri, Kalasari, Charzeyi varieties [Yarshater, 1969: 17; Yarshater, 1970: 451–454].

5. Eastern Azerbaijan: including Harzand, Dizmar, Karingan, Kalibar and other areas (cf. [Asghari, 2016]).

6. Rudbar, Alamut and Kuhpayeh. in the river of Gilan in the section of Jirandeh and Farab (cf. [Sabzalipour, 2011]) and Rostamabad (cf. [Alizadeh Juboni, 2010]).

7 North of Khorasan, Chardeh Sankhasat area [Safarzadeh, 2003: 23].

In this article we examine a specific variety of one dialect of the Tati that is Tati Khalkhali (Xalxāli). The Tati of Khalkhal city (Ardebil province) is common in two areas of Khoresh Rostam and Shahroud. Due to the mountainous nature of the region, that is located between the two local mountain ranges of Aqdaq (Âqdâq) and Talash hills, the Tati language of Khalkhal had still largely preserved many of its ancient features. Today, due to the expansion of infrastructure and communication technologies, urbanization, as well as the introduction of the Persian language as a medium of instruction, Tati of Khalkhal is losing its ancient features and goes through the various stages of endangerment.

The Tati of Khalkhal vernacular is known today in two villages of Karnaq and Lerd in Khalkhal that belong to the Tati speaking villages of Ardebil province in Northwest Iran.

In this article we analyze one of the regional secret varieties of Tati – a specific professional argot known as Arranaji, or Qarqadili, that has been common for centuries in the Tati-speaking villages of northwestern Iran. This language existed only in a spoken form and has never before was documented. This idiom was used by carpenters who worked seasonally in the faraway urban centers of northern Iran, in Gilan and Mazandaran provinces.

We documented the total vocabulary of this language that consists of less than five hundred words. We describe the specifics of the structure of the secret language of Arranaji (Arrânaji), based on the Tati dialects of the villages of Karnaq and Lerd, but applying a different substitutive

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children are losing interest in their mother tongue outside the family. Since they hear only Persian in the media, they are increasingly switching to using Persian at school and at social events [Sabzalipour, Izadifar, 2025: 208].

vocabulary. We show in the article the sociolinguistic characteristics of this language variety (Arranaji) and its codes from the sociolinguistic perspective, the area of its spread and main areas of function; the origin of the local names of this speech as Arranaji and/or Qarqadili; age/gender groups of its users in the society, i.e. professional woodworkers seasonally living out of home region in diasporic communities and its gender-specific functions.

The major question of this research is – what was the motivation of the Tati-speaking people of the region behind the creation of the secret language, like Arranaji, in Khalkhal.

The sociolinguistic data of this article is based on [Sabzalipour, Delgarm, 2016; Yousefinejad, Sabzalipour, 2017] with the additional field cases collected in 2020–2024. The field data were gathered during our interviews with middle-aged men in two Tati speaking villages of Ardebil province in Northwest Iran, Karnaq (Karin) and Lerd (Lord) in Khalkhal. Additional in-depth interviews were conducted with Karnaq Tati-speaking men who live in the city of Rasht, Gilan.

In this article we examine the specifics of the professional argot of carpenters seasonally living in diasporic communities, known as Arranaji, or Qarqadili, that has been common for centuries in these Tati-speaking villages of northwestern Iran. This argot was used by people who worked seasonally in the urban centers of northern Iran, in Gilan and Mazandaran provinces and were seasonally living in diasporic isolated male communities. They developed a large number of euphemistic and coded expressions and taboo vocabulary related to gender, sex-life and its prohibitions in their lives. As this language has only a spoken form and has never before was documented, we found today the total lexicon of less than five hundred words. Today, this argot has lost its original professional functions and gender restrictions and is used as a family secret language to keep information out from the strangers, or children.

## **2 | Research approach**

One of the important topics of language studies is the sociology of language. Sociology of language explores the relationship between the society and language. Humans have always tried to keep parts of their speech secret from others. They use existing words in a context other than the original and conventional context so that only their target audience understands it, but others will be unable to comprehend the meaning.

There are secret languages all over the world and each one has its special name. These varieties often borrow their name from the job or a trait of the people who speak that language. Below we give some examples of secret languages.

In addition to full-fledged languages, there are also languages that somehow have a marginal position; these languages include lingua franca languages, pidgins, and creoles. These languages have existed since ancient times. Whenever there was a human society, there were marginal languages along with the main and full-fledged languages [Wardhaugh, 2014: 102].

Whenever two or more speakers or two or more groups of speakers want to talk about trade, social, cultural or political aspects in a way that only a certain group of their friends and colleagues would understand the meaning of their words, they use a special language. This language is known by various names such as Argo(t), Secret Language, Loterai, and Mysterious Language.

Various definitions [Samaei, 2013: 5–6] of secret language have been put forward:

A language that only a certain class, especially aberrant people, marginals, like thieves or vagabonds, mendicant dervishes, speak and understand (underworld argot) [Ivanow, 1927].

A collection of words and expressions that are used by a certain group (craftsmen, jewelers, coppers (*mesgari*), musicians, etc.) and are difficult for others to understand.

Special words of some social groups and occupations.

Secret language (Zargari, Morqi, Lotrai, etc.) is a common term among Iranian people and refers to languages that are mostly made to keep a secret. A (secret) jargon, or argo(t) from French, is known to define the secret jargons of Loterai or Jobelin, both of which are related to the 19th century [Kalveh, 2009: 9].

The oldest document that informs of the prevalence and use of a fictitious and secret language under the term Lotera(i) (Loterāi) among a group of Iranian people is the 10<sup>th</sup> century anonymous world geography “Hodud al-alam...”. While describing the city of Astarabad it mentions that the Astarabadi population speaks two languages, one is Astarabadi Loterai and the other is Gorgani Persian [Hodud al-alam, 1961: 144]. E. Yarshater called “Loterai Astrabadi” the language of the Jews of Astarabad [Yarshater, 2011], and S. Kia termed it as Parsi Gorgani. It is possibly the same dialect that Fazlullah Astarabadi, the founder of the Hurufi sect, and some of his followers used in their writings in the 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries [Kia, 1948; Bolukbashi, 2000: 112–113]. The earliest definition of the word Lotera(i) was given in 11th/17th century work of Mir Jamaladdin Hossein Enju Shirazi “Farhange Jahāngiri”. According to this definition: Loterai is a language that two people put together so that when they speak with each other, strangers do not understand it.

Yarshater suggests that the term Loterai made its way from the ancient Jewish community to the Persian-speaking community; Zargari (*zargar* ‘goldsmith’) language, is one of the most common types of this category of secret and artificial languages in Iran, and probably dates back to the Safavid



period of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The author of “Farhange Jahāngiri” defined Loterai as “the language of goldsmiths” [Bolukbashi, 2000: 122]. He mentioned that these varieties are popular among small social groups of speakers such as Lotera of the Jews of Isfahan and Hamadan, Lotera of musicians and goldsmiths of Tehran. There were known also other Lotera variants that are called Morqi (i.e. of birds), Kashki and Sini. The other secret occupational languages include the speech of Goldsmiths, a variant of Morqi and Lami constructed languages in Mashhad, the language of butchers in Tehran, the speech of coppersmiths of Isfahan, the building workers of Yazd, the beggars of Lorestan and the Darvish of Qazvin (cf. [Doomanian, 2007: 5–6]).

Another group of close speech varieties are variants of Selyari (selyāri (سلياری)) in Firuzkuh (cf. [Sotoudeh, 1962]); Selyari in Namarestaq region in Amol spread among felt-makers (cf. [Bashirnejad, 2011]), and Selyari spread among coppersmith (and tinsmith) in the city of Ramsar and its vicinity.

### 3 | Linguistic structure of secret languages

If natural and artificial languages are compared, we can say that former were gradually created and perfected over the centuries, and were not consciously done by an author or a group of authors. The artificial languages are created by a special person or group, and naturally, they pay attention to the way they are constructed, and it can be said that they have a good choice of metaphorical words or poetic taste, or they have special skills in recognizing the syllables and morphemes of the language.

In describing the word-forming processes of secret languages with special attention to French Louis-Jean Calvet defines four general principles [Kalveh, 2009]:

1) Metaphoric usage. In this case the meaning goes through a series of transformation (often in a way of making fun, as a mockery); homeless people on the street are certainly not all lame, but society may perceive them as being lame. Sometimes the image created in this way is used again and causes the emergence of semantic structures.

2) Summarization. Here the principle of saving effort is applied. This method is specific to the vernacular languages (as the words become shorter), since forms are not usually well-sounded, a suffix is added as a result.

3) Affixation. The suffixes are widespread in the secret languages (especially the *o* suffixes), which add a special resonance and a kind of colour to the language of common people and secret languages.

4) Ruled secret languages. It means that words in secret languages use special rules for being transformed [Kalveh, 2009: 16–17].

Regarding the formal processes of word formation in secret languages, Louis-Jean Calvet [Kalveh, 2009] introduced two processes of summarization and expansion as follows:

One of the general principles of the evolution of languages and changes in vocabulary is the principle of less effort. This is reflected in the summarization and by which is meant the process of removing one or more syllables at the beginning or at the end of the word. For example, in the widespread language, the word *prof* is used for Professor (Master); *ciné* is used for cinéma (cinema), which itself is a summarization of cinématographe, and *metro* is used for métropolitain (metro) [Kalveh, 2009: 17].

### 3.1 Methods applied in construction of secret languages Zargari, Gonješki, and Morqi

Some points about the construction of secret languages (such as Zargari, Gonješki (of sparrows), and Morqi (of birds) languages) we find in [Bolukbashi, 2000], for the detailed description of the linguistic features of these languages, see [Rezaee Baghabidi, 2003].

Bolukbashi gives some examples of the secret languages' construction [2000: 120–124].

1) Zargari (Goldsmith's) is made by adding the letter *z* after each syllable in the word with the addition of the preceding vowel:

- a. âtaš → â-zâ-ta-za-š
- b. anbor → a-za-bo-zo-r

2) Gonješki is made according to the same principle, it brings two letters *š* and *j* after each syllable of the word. In Gonješki and Morqi, usually two letters come together. The first letter is fixed and the second letter takes the vowel of the previous syllable:

- a. âtaš → â-šjâ-taš-jaš
- b. anbor → a-šjan-bo-âšjo-r

3) The Morqi is made by adding two letters *r* and *q* after each syllable of the word:

- a. âtaš → â-rqâ-ta-rqa-š
- b. anbor → a-rqa-n-bor-qon





## 4 | Background of the secret languages

### 4.1 Review of the secret languages around the world

In Louis-Jean Calvet's book "What is a secret language?" the author introduced some secret languages of France and described their main features as follows [Kalveh, 2009]:

1. Expressions derived from texts related to French prisoners of the 14<sup>th</sup> century;
2. Criminal urban Group, whose language was exposed after their trial in 1955;
3. The modified glossary of idioms of the secret language, which was constantly reprinted until the 19th century;
4. The words used about Cartouche (1693–1721, the famous gang leader who was finally executed in Geneva) in the play by Legrand, called "Cartouche and Thieves". Four years later (1725), Granol composed a poem in which there were many words from a secret language;
5. The secret language of the arsonists, who were a group of thieves in the Auger region of France, and their language was revealed during their trial;
6. The language introduced by Eugène-François Vidocq (1775–1857), a prisoner sentenced to hard labor who later became a police officer, writing his memoirs in two books [Kalveh, 2009].

W.A. Ivanow introduced into scholarship a manuscript of a collection of philosophical and Sufi treatises called "Ketāb-e Sāsiyān" ("The Book of Parasitic Beggars or "Book of Grifters") containing a glossary of an argot [Ivanow, 1922; Bolukbashi, 2000]. According to the lexical analysis he estimated the date of the compilation of the manuscript as approximately of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, according to the treatise itself, it dates back to the period before the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. So, it is assumed that the manuscript was rewritten from an older variant [Ivanow, 1922: 376–377; Bolukbashi, 2000: 111].

In his research "New information on secret languages (Argo) in Central Asia" I.M. Oransky introduced the language of the Qawal group of Tajikistan as ethnic group, Qawal, in Kulab and its argo. This language is related to the language of a small group in Tajikistan. This people are known as Qawal, and it is assumed that they moved in the distant past from the adjacent Afghanistan and settled in Tajik area [Oransky, 1996: 166–167].



I.P. Petrushevsky defines “Sassian” or “Sassanian” as poor, vagabonds and beggars who formed an occupational group [Petrushevsky, 1975: 209]<sup>89</sup>. These were people who accompanied wrestlers and artisans in organized occupations and spoke in a dialect that can be also called Loterai.

#### 4.2 Background of secret languages in Iran

The first writer who spoke about the secret language (Lotera) in Iran, namely Astarabadi, was the unknown author of the book “Hodud al-alam” [1961: 395]. In “Artificial languages” [Zomorrodian, 1969] are discussed the characteristics of various secret languages. Yarshater [2011] mentioned the Jewish Loterai of Iran and believed that the term *Loterai* came from the ancient Jewish community.

In his two works W.A. Ivanow [1922; 1927], studies Gypsy-Darwish Jargon (Loterai) and speech of Persian mendicant Darwishes, the latter based on the manuscript of the “Ketāb-e Sāsiyān” [Ivanow, 1927].

The Seliyari language in Firouzkoh, that is, the language of the felt-makers of the Namarestaq region in Amol was described in [Sotoudeh, 1962], some aspects of Seliyari are touched upon in [Bashirnejad 2011], useful information about the conventional Seliyari-Loterai slang is provided in [Doomanian, 2007].

In [Bolukbashi, 2000: 122] is described the background of the goldsmith language that reached the 17<sup>th</sup> century (the Safavid period), I. Kalbassi discussed in her work the grammatical and lexical features of the Indo-European Indo-Aryan Romano (Zargari) language [Kalbāssi, 1993]. The structure of Zargari language and its state of endangerment is reviewed in [Rezai Baghbidi, 2003]. See also one of the first descriptions of Zargari in Iran [Homayuni, 1977].

The talk of Tehran’s students (males as well as females) was collected by M. Samai and described in his “The Lexicon of Secret Language” [2013].

The linguistic aspects of Jaber language, that is known as a secret language of the Jaber village – located near the Badra city in Ilam province in Iran – have been studied in [Tafarroji Yeganeh, Ansari, 2019]. The authors revealed that Jaber was compiled by the scribes, people who were writing down the prayers for people and who wanted to protect their professional secrets when working outside their home area.

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<sup>89</sup> See Russian release of I.P. Petrushevsky’s “Islam v Irane v VII–XV vekah” where he speaks of professional corporation of *Sasian* or *Sasanian* as lumpen classes, wanderers and mendicants who had their occupational jargon (Petrushevsky, 1966: 197). (прим. ред.)



In J. Sabzalipour and R. Delgarm's work on the secret language Arranaji in Tati-speaking areas of Khalkhal authors study the main features of this variety speech in comparison with pidgin [2016].

## **5 | The secret language Arranaji or Qarqadili among Khalkhal Tati speakers**

### **5.1 Reasons behind the creation of the Arranaji**

There are three main reasons for using Iranian secret languages:

First, to specify group identity and strengthen solidarity; second, keeping personal secrets and group secrets hidden from others and blocking the access to their knowledge to foreigners; third, for entertainment and joking [Bolukbashi, 2000: 19].

Professional worker from mountainous areas moved to urbanized centres of the northern Iran spoke Tati. Their language was relatively similar to the language varieties of the northern regions (such as Taleshi, Gilaki and Mazandarani) and their co-workers from other areas understood them with some effort. So, the Tati speakers created a coded language in order to keep their professional secrets and their private lives and jokes from others.

In application to Arranaji all of these three reasons were involved. Living in the heart of mountainous ranges of Aqdaq of Khalkhal and Talash, the people of Khalkhal region were traditionally involved in animal husbandry, agriculture and horticulture. This environment seasonal involvement with labour allowed in the past those who were looking for the additional jobs to migrate (seasonally or permanently) out of this region. Urban life and its benefits attracted rural people to provincial centers and cities. Getting into contact with new people in new places of residence led to the spread of interethnic marriages.

These are the main reasons that as parents were speaking different languages, gradually the whole family stopped speaking or understanding the native Tati language (or some other local language), and switched to Persian. So, Tati, which once remained intact in the mountains, was losing its original features due to the influence of migration, urbanization and interethnic marriages.

In addition, the natural disasters of Khalkhal region (such as floods, earthquakes and landslides) made villagers to move away to various places of residence as they have lost their homes. This way was destroyed the village of Gehraz (Ge(h)râz) in Khorash-Rostam Khalkhal district that was destroyed by the 1990 Rudbar and Manjil earthquake, and its people moved closer to the center of Khoresh-Rastam district, in Hashtjin, and created a new village there. An example of a village that changed its location in Khalkhal due to a landslide is Karnaq. This village is one of the villages of Khoresh-Rostam Khalkhal district, which after the landslide of 1969, was built in another quarter of



the same village. And today the old part of this village is called Kohne Deh (“The Old Village”). These social and environmental changes have directly affected the Tati language.

Another inevitable development among the Tati speakers of Khalkhal city is the men’s mass migration (seasonal or permanent) from this area to the northern cities of Iran (such as Neka, Behshar, Sari, Rasht, Asalem). The presence of rich forestry in the north of Iran has created jobs in carpentry wood cutting and woodworking. Sawing with saws that were double headed and pulled from both sides by two people was very popular in the past. Workers cut trees in the wood, saw them, made timber and boards from sturdy trees, produced various woodworking objects and were involved in carpentry. The existence of such jobs in the northern cities of Iran attracted men from this highland to work in the sawmill or carpentry business living there for months away from home. In Tati language, carpentry or sawing is called *arrânaĵi*. These carpenters who seasonally lived away from their homes, have created a specific language called Arranaji, which was meant to keep the secrets of their jobs and their needs.

When the carpenters of the two areas (Shahroud and Khorsrostan Khalkhal) went out seeking job to the northern urbanized centres, the distance and the lack of infrastructure and communication means prevented them from going home regularly. They sometimes worked for up to half a year away from their families in carpentry factories. These workers were living either in a portocabin near their workplace, or as a group in rented house.

This way was created Arranaji that was a way of communication between these people who were involved in sawing and carpentry. In earlier days only these workers were fully familiar with it, although in recent decades, some people in the region have learned some expressions from its speakers, but they didn’t understand it completely.

## **5.2 Arranaji features of an occupational language and its functions**

One of the reasons to create and keep the secret languages is to preserve important job secrets. As language sociology studies show that secret languages grow in a society for various reasons. All over the world, there are cases that the speakers of a secret language are united by the mutual job and occupation, or belong to the same social or ethnic group. Among such varieties can be mentioned the language of the goldsmiths, Zargari, in the Middle East and Central Asia. In Iran are known the language of coppersmiths and tinsmiths in Ramsar and its surroundings (Selyari), language specific to bricklayers of Amol (Irai). One of this type is Arranaji, that is also a professional vernacular.



Most of these professionals were Tati speakers and were working far from their home area, usually in the wooden north part of the country of Iran. According to the common tradition of those times they tried to keep the secrets of their job from strangers. It was the motivation of these people to create and use secret language, but later when this artificial language was already in use, they began using it in other cases as well.

Arranaji is a language that has three main functions:

- Keeping professional secrets
- Recreation and leisure situations
- Denoting prohibited notions and taboos (gender relations and sex, drugs, etc.)

Examination of the field data obtained from the argot of the woodworkers of Tati speakers of Shahroud Khalkhal shows that the reason for the abundance of taboo words and specific sexual slang can be the single gender of these workers' communities and their life in distance from their families. The frequency of words used to refer to drugs, probably indicates the spread of these drugs among workers or among people around them. The hard work, harsh conditions and long working hours in addition to their distance from their home, can explain specific jokes that often happen in single-sex environments. It is noted that in the structure of the most of the secret languages, many words have been created for drugs and their use [Kalveh, 2009: 53]. In Arranaji, for example, to refer to opium are used words, such as *pišešoli*, *zirkin*, *zoppe*, *siyâbarâ* and *siyâi*.

Another function of Arranaji is to use this argot in the close male community for entertainment. It can be visual and audio entertainment (games, theatre performances, films, songs), or comic sketches (verbal entertainment with sexual humor and jokes) that include jokes, especially sexually loaded innuendos and taboos. This verbal entertainment were spread among the woodworkers. The Arranaji examples of expressions referring to sexual taboos:

- a) anjil âban 'to become a fig' (to be subjected to sexual acts, to become a prostitute)
- b) anjil âkardan 'to make a fig' (adultery)
- c) pič dan 'screwing' (grabbing someone by force – fornication or adultery)
- d) tarm: unknown meaning (male genitalia)
- e) čubar: unknown meaning (female vagina, a woman who jests)
- f) čubar kardan: (violation of woman's private parts).
- g) suzan zan: light and flashing (blinking)
- h) kadxodâyi kardan: (to have the ability to have sexual intercourse with someone)



Two recent further functions that have been observed in recent decades should be added to the above function. These two functions include keeping family secrets in front of strangers, as well as from the children of the family.

### 5.3 The spread of Arranaji

Originally Arranaji was common among the Tati speakers of Khalkhâl villages who live in Khoresh Rostam and Shahrud Khalkhâl.

It was spread strictly among the carpenters of this region, but later became known among other people as well. Women usually don't know this language unless they have learned something from their husbands or fathers.

It is spoken in the villages of Karnaq and Lerd. Sometimes people from the neighboring villages, including Karen, also know some words of this language. Below, the two villages of Karnaq and Lerd will be introduced in general.

Karnaq, or in Tati Karna, is a mountainous village in Khoresh-Rostam Khalkhal district, which is located at 48 degrees 36 minutes longitude and 37 degrees 48 minutes latitude. The climate here is severe. According to the census of the Iranian Statistics Center in 2015, Karnaq had 216 people population and according to the 2010 census, there were 177 people living in it. Today, the village of Karnaq has lost most of its population. One of the reasons for this high level of migration was the earthquake and landslide in 1969. Another reason is the remoteness of this village from the center of Khoresh Rostam and Shahrud.

Karnaq is one of the most remote villages of Khoresh-Rostam district, people here mostly interact with the people of Shahrud district. The closeness in their language is high (so the inhabitants of Khalkhâl mistakenly may be considered as a part of Shahrud settlers). Population of Karnaq who moved away from their native village live mostly in the city of Rasht, in Gilan.

The village Lerd is part of Palangâh rural district. The name Lerd is official name and is used administrative correspondence. This village is part of Palangâh rural district. Only the residents of the neighboring Karin village pronounce this word as Lord. Lerd is located 27 kilometers far from Kolor or the center of Shahrud district and is the largest village of Khalkhâl city. According to the 2015 census, Lerd has 926 households and a population of nearly 3523 people. Due to the seasonal migration of the residents of this village to the cities of Gilan and their return in spring and summer seasons to plant and harvest agricultural products, the population of Lerd reaches to about 5000



people in these seasons. A large number of young men in this village work in construction, and for this reason, they spend several months of the year as contractors in construction companies in various cities, including Rasht, Tehran, Bandar Abbas and some southern cities of Iran. Others make a living through agriculture, animal husbandry and beekeeping in the local area.

#### 5.4 The etymology of Arranaji and Qarqadili

The name Arranaji refers to a particular type of job to do with cutting trees, sawing wood and carpentry in Tati. The name of the speech variety Arranaji is derived from the word *arrânaji* that is in Tati ‘carpentry’ or ‘sawing’ occupation. It is a noun which is formed from the Tati infinitive *arrântan* ‘to pull towards oneself’ (past participle is *arânt*, present participle – *arânj*), cf. (Persian *arra* ‘saw (tool)’). This name describes the act of sawing or cutting tree with the help of a large double-sided saw, when two people staying on both sides of the trunk of the tree or timber move a saw back and forth, this way cutting a tree or a piece of wood. This occupation was common in the past in different areas of the country, especially in the northern provinces of Iran, which have lots of forests. Nowadays, with the introduction of wood-cutting machines, this method has disappeared, and sawing work is done by industrial machinery.

Another name for this speech variety is Qarqadili. It consists of *qarqa* ‘crow’ and *dil* ‘tongue’, and means “Crow’s language”. Both words belong to the Turkic (Azeri) variety of the settlers of Khalkhal. Due to the fact that the Turkic speech is widespread in Khalkhal area, a number of Tati-speaking people are also familiar with it. There is a possibility that the name of Qarqadili was given by Turkic-speaking people of the surrounding areas. It can be explained through the expressions people use when they can’t read another person’s handwriting, saying that this handwriting is like a crab’s<sup>90</sup>, or if they don’t understand somebody’s language, then they say that this person speaks the language of crow.

#### 5.5 Arranaji as a specifically male language

The Arranaji was used secretly by men in their professional communities in the isolated places and in the places of its formation and did not spread to other adjacent areas, so outside people had no opportunity or requirement to get acquainted with it. The need of safety and comfort, as well as

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. Persian *xat-e xarčang(-e) qurbāqe* (م.ج. خط خرنجنگورباغه) ‘illegible handwriting’ (неразборчивый почерк), (*xarčang* ‘crab’, рак; краб) (БПС 2020), and “crow’s speech” (Persian *zabāne kalāqi*) вороний. (прим. ред.)



standing out from other groups of employees and also employers, forced them to create secret language in order to be able to use it in any situation, including an intimate humorous atmosphere inside their own community.

When collecting the data for this research in the two villages (Lerd and Karnaq), we learned that women are primarily not familiar with this secret language. This point was confirmed by the men of these two villages. However, the women of this area today know some words and expressions and use them among themselves. This happened due to the women's curiosity and because the language is no longer a strict secret. As a result, its idioms became to some extent known among women and even girls who were in touch with their husbands and fathers.

Today only men of this region can use sexually loaded vocabulary when in the specifically male meetings and away from their families.

## **5.6 Arranaji and pidgin languages**

We decided to make a field experiment testing whether Arranaji is a pidgin language or not (field data of 2022–2023). We follow the definition given by Wardhaugh who defines pidgin as follows: It is a language that does not have any native speakers and is not the first language of anyone, but is a language of communication. In other words, it is the result of a multilingual situation in which those who want to communicate with each other have to find or make up a simple language so that they can communicate with each other [Wardhaugh, 2014: 108]. The philosophy of using pidgin is to communicate in multilingual environments, that are commercial and business oriented.

Our data show that Arranaji can't be categorized as a pidgin, because this language was not created to communicate with others in the workplace, but, on the contrary, it was formatted to prevent others from understanding and communicating with its speakers, who usually were woodworkers outside of their native environment. They invented this language that was later called Arranaji just to prevent other people from understanding them and to protect their craft's secrets.

These people themselves communicated with other coworkers or their superiors in Tati or Persian languages.

In J. Sabzalipour and R. Delgarm's work on the secret language Arranaji in Tati-speaking areas of Khalkhal authors make a comparison of this variety with pidgins. They concluded that Arranaji does not fall into a category of pidgins, but is a secret language that was used by carpenters to keep their job secrets. The results of their research showed that this language is based on and has some similarities with Tati, but also differs from Tati dialects of Khalkhal [2016].



### 5.7 Changing the function of Arranaji

As time passed, the secret language of Arranaji has lost its main function of solely occupational language. This kind of shift happened not only with Arranaji, but also is true for other secret languages of Iran (for example Selyari/Mesgari), as today, the workers and their skills needed to work as copper-, tin-smith or zinc-work have disappeared, as well as tin or copper dishes, and people have switched to porcelain and aluminium dishware made in the factories.

This language, which was once used strictly inside close man's communities, and was far from the reach of women and children due to its trade or sexual aspects, and some prohibited habits of profits, such as references to drugs and opium, today died out.

After several decades, these jobs no longer existed and men gradually began using it in the village, but this time not to keep their professional secrets, but to keep their family's secrets and reputation in front of the strangers. For example, when a guest comes to the house, the lady of the house can ask her husband in a secret language, whether the guest would stay for the night, and her husband would have an ability to answer her in a secret language. Then they apply coded speech and secret words.

In another case, when the husband wants to tell the people of his household to be careful with the newcomer, so that this person would not understand what the family is talking about, he asks his wife:

a.

tija	təla	ma-ka	šata	dâr	pe-šu
meaningless	drop	NEG-do.IMP.2SG	so-and-so	tree	PRV-go.PRES.3SG
Be careful that the other person does not understand our sayings.					

b.

xorda	vašir-ə	raza=r	ni	bâri	bə-lisə
so-and-so	hungry-be.PRS.3SG	meaningless=2SG	not	bring.PRS.2SG	SBJV-lick.3SG
He is hungry, don't you have food, so you bring for him to eat?					

Changing Arranaji into a language for keeping family secrets in front of guests, is not specific only to the villages of Lerd, Karnaq and Karin, or the villages where Arranaji was common. When it lost its strictly closed communal function, this language has become more or less known in some Tati villages.

Another function that Arranaji has acquired in recent years is the privacy of the parents of the family. Sometimes it happens that parents want to say something when their child is around, but they don't want him to understand, so they use this secret language (for example, when the child is sleepy, and he is crying because of that).

### 5.8. Selected examples of Arranaji

The following sentences are provided as examples of Arranaji secret language. The sentences are recorded from the Arranaji in Karnaq village:

a)

salâm	raza=r	lišt-a
hello	meaningless=3SG	lick.PST-3SG
Hello, did you eat food?		

b)

na	lišt-a=m	ni
no	lick.PST-PRF=1SG	not
No, I didn't eat food.		

c)

garm-a	vili=r	lišt-a
hot-ADJ	meaningless=2SG	lick.PST-3SG
Did you drink tea?		

d)

raza	bi-lis	xor	â-b-âm
meaningless	IMP-lick.2SG	good	PRV-be-3PL
Eat bread! Let's go.			

e)

garm-a	vili	ma-lis-âm
hot-ADJ	meaningless	not-lick-3PL
Don't we drink tea?		

f)

galaji	ma-gom	xorda	bul-aši
speech	not-eat.IMP.2SG	guy	understand-3SG
Don't speak! The guy understands.			

g)

bey	xor	â-b-aš
stand.up-IMP.2SG	good	PRV-be-IMP.2SG
Stand up! Go!		

h)

tan-dakar	dâr-i	
body-cloth	have.PRS-2SG	
Do you have clothes?		

i)

xorda	su-zan	navâr-â
person	light-hit	askew-FEM
The person's eye is askew.		

j)

gala-mäj-ân=ər	bidi	â-gi
footstep-walk-PL=2SG	meaningless	PRV-IMP.2SG
Put your feet together.		

## 6 | Conclusion

Thus, in this article we analyzed one secret language that is based on the regional Iranian language Tati and represents a professional argot known as Arranaji, or Qarqadili.

We clarified that in the past the socio-economic situation in the mountainous Khalkhal region forced men living in this region to seek work in the nearby cities. This people, who were mostly living in the southern Tati villages of Shahrud and Khoresh Rostam Khalkhal, in particular in the villages of Lerd, Karnaq and Karin, went to the northern urban centres of Rasht, Sari, Behshar, Neka and etc. seeking work in cutting and sawing wood and carpentry.

In the new environment Tati speakers creating a coded speech in order to keep their professional and other secrets, and to preserve their private lives and jokes from intruders.

Our field data show that this idiom was spread only among men that were living in diasporic communities. Women had no access to this speech variety. Only later when this speech lost its main function of being a secret language, they were allowed to acquire some of its knowledge.

In recent decades, this variant has lost its former professional function and has become a secret language of families whose ancestors were engaged in cutting and processing wood, and carpentry. The dialect began to be used to keep secrets at home from strangers, neighbours or children.

As was revealed in [Sabzalipour, Delgarm, 2016], Arranaji does not fall into a category of pidgins, but is a secret language that was used by carpenters to keep their job secrets.

Today, this language is deteriorating, and people use a lesser number of words and expressions.

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