

## The quantitative nature of meters in Persian folk songs and pop song lyrics

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I propose a new approach for the analysis of the metrical structure of Persian folk songs and pop song lyrics. I claim that the main factor distinguishing these songs from classical Persian poetry is that they are composed in colloquial Persian (as opposed to formal/written Persian), and that the metrical rules governing this style of poetry follow the same principles as classical Persian poetry, only adapted to match the distinctive phonological characters of colloquial Persian. In particular, the possibility of a short reading for the traditionally long Persian vowels in colloquial Persian is at the core of the difference between the two metrical systems.

Classical Persian poetry is known to have a quantitative metrical system based on syllable weight (see for example Hayes 1979, Kiparsky 2013). This is not the case for colloquial songs, however. The most prominent view on the metrical structure of these songs is the one introduced by Tabibzadeh (2003) (qtd. in Azarmakan 2014) for folk songs, and expanded by Azarmakan et al. (2014) and Tabibzadeh et al. (2015) to cover children’s songs and pop song lyrics, respectively. According to this view, the meters of the poems of these songs rely on stress and are not quantitative.

I argue that colloquial Persian songs (folk songs, children’s songs, and pop song lyrics) are quantitative and follow exactly the same set of meters as classical Persian poems. Following Hayes (1979), I make a distinction between two modules in metrical analysis. The first one is the set of correspondence rules that map an individual verse to an abstract metrical pattern. In classical Persian poetry, for example, the correspondence rules dictate that CV syllables are represented as L (light), CVC and CVV syllables (where VV can represent a long vowel) are represented as H (heavy), and CVVC, CVCC, and CVVCC syllables are represented as S (superheavy), or more conveniently as HL. An example of the application of these rules is shown in (1) for two verses of a poem by Saadi (13<sup>th</sup> century CE).

- |     |            |    |                 |         |         |  |
|-----|------------|----|-----------------|---------|---------|--|
| (1) | næ.bi:.ni: | ke | sæχ.ti: be      | gɑ:.jæt | re.si:d |  |
|     | LHH        | L  | HH L            | HH      | LH      |  |
|     | mæ.ʃeg.gæt | be | hæd.de:næhɑ:jæt |         | re.si:d |  |
|     | LHH        | L  | HH              | LHH     | LH      |  |

The correspondence rules map both of these verses to the abstract metrical pattern LHH-LHH-LHH-LH. This is where the second important module in metrical analysis comes into play. The fact that this pattern is a metrically valid meter is a property of the metrical patterns of classical Persian poetry.

My main claim is that colloquial Persian songs follow the same basic metrical patterns, but have different correspondence rules. In particular, I argue that their main point of departure from classical Persian poetry is that they allow (but not force) the traditionally long Persian vowels (/ɑ u i/) to be analyzed as short, like the traditionally short vowels (/æ e o/). This means that the syllable /ba(:)/, for instance, is allowed to be mapped to either an L or an H, but the syllable /bæ/ can only be mapped to an L. The opening lines of (“Jom’eh”) written by contemporary lyricist Shahyar Ghanbari are analyzed in this manner in (2). In (2) the cases where traditionally long vowels are analyzed as short in violation of the correspondence rules of classical Persian poetry are shown in bold. Note that cases such as analyzing a long vowel as short before the coda /n/ and making a short vowel long at the end of a word are not bold since they follow the correspondence rules of classical Persian poetry (Hayes 1979).

- |     |              |     |                 |        |                     |                     |
|-----|--------------|-----|-----------------|--------|---------------------|---------------------|
| (2) | d̤zom.ʔe     | az  | æb.re           | si.jɑ: | χun                 | <b>mi.</b> t̤ʃe.ke: |
|     | HL           | H   | HL              | LH     | H                   | LLH                 |
|     | d̤zom.ʔe.hɑ: | χun | <b>d̤zɑ.</b> je | bɑ:run | <b>mi.</b> t̤ʃe.ke: |                     |
|     | HLH          | H   | LL              | HH     | LLH                 |                     |

Both lines in (2) in fact follow the pattern LLHH – LLHH – LLH (starting with LLHH and not HLHH). The first LLHH of a line is allowed to be (and often is) realized as HLHH (as in these two verses) in classical Persian poetry too, as explained by Shamisa (2004). The fourteenth century poet Hafez, for example, uses HLHH in the beginning of the first verse in the poem starting with “ej.be ren.dan mæ.ko.nej za:.he.de...” (Ghazal 80), but starts the second verse with LLHH (“ke go.nɑ:.he: de.gæ.ran bær...”).

A more complicated example is given in (3), where four lines of a pop song by Ali Akhavan Langeroodi sung by Kourosh Yaghmaee, are analyzed in this manner. This song is chosen because it is one of the examples given by Tabibzadeh et al. (2015) and claimed to lack quantitative meter. I argue that it follows a well-known quantitative pattern. Note that a verse-final superheavy syllable (as in line 4) must be mapped to an H according to the traditional correspondence rules (Hayes, 1979).

- (3) 1.    sej.le    gæm    a:.**ba.di**.mo:    **vi**.ru:.ne    kær.de:  
           HL    H        HLLH        LHL        HH
2.    væg.**ti**   ba:    mæn    **mi.mu**.ni:    tan.**ha.yi**.mo:    **bad**    **mi**.ba.re:  
           HL    H        H        LLH        HLLH        H        LLH
3.    do    **ta**    tʃeʃ.**mam**    **ba.ru**.ne:    ʃæ.bu:.ne    kær.de:  
           L    L        HH        LLH        LHL        HH
4.    bæ.**ha**.ræz    dæs.**ta**.je.mæn    pær    zæ.do    ræft  
           LLH        HLLH        H        LL    H

The metrical patterns used in (3) are re-written and fragmented in (4) for ease of reading:

- (4) 1.    HLHH LLHLHLHH  
       2.    HLHH LLHH LLHH LLH  
       3.    LLHH LLHLHLHH  
       4.    LLHH LLHH LLH

The general pattern used in this song is a number of repetitions of LLHH, optionally followed by an LLH (the initial HLHH's can be analyzed as LLHH as explained above). This is a known pattern in classical Persian poetry, although the number of LLHHs can differ only in newer styles of classical poetry, and the optionality of the final LLH is a novelty (traditionally the final LLH is either always present or always absent in the lines of the same poem). There is also a more important anomaly that needs to be addressed. In lines 1 and 3 the pattern is LLHLHLHH, not LLHH-LLHH. As the underlined characters demonstrate, an HL sequence is replaced by an LH sequence in these lines, making them different from the other lines. This alternation is not attested in classical poetry (hence a difference, although small, in metrical patterns rather than the correspondence rules), but the pattern LLHLHLHH itself is a common pattern in Persian poetry (known as *Ramal Muthamman Mashkool*), and the alternation between the two is in fact exactly the same alternation that is found in Greek metrics between Ionic dimeter (LLHH LLHH) and anacreontic (LLHLHLHH), showing that this alternation can be expected in quantitative metrical systems.

The two examples above are not cherry-picked. More than 160 randomly selected colloquial Persian verses were examined in this manner and all of them were found to be analyzable in this way. This approach not only explains the metrical system of these songs, but also makes sense from the viewpoint of the phonology of formal and colloquial Persian. The vowel length distinction is claimed by many (see Toosarvandani 2004) to have faded away in colloquial Persian. This approach shows that while the length distinction is indeed more tentative in colloquial Persian, it is still important, since the traditionally long vowels can play both roles while the traditionally short vowels are always short.

#### References:

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