Journal of Modern Languages
Vol. 32, No.1 (2022)
https://doi.org/10.22452/jml.vol32no1.3

Maimani Language and Lawati Language: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

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Abstract

The concomitance of several minority languages side by side with Arabic has played a significant role in enriching Oman's linguistic diversity. Associated largely with the home domain, the vitality of these languages is highly dependent on the attention availed by their own native speakers to their usage and inter-generational transmission. The existence of some of these languages is not commonly recognised, nor is their status failsafe. Owing to a certain degree of lexical resemblance amongst these languages, inter alia, some of them are often viewed and presented as dialects of one another rather than distinct languages of their own, a fact that has fed into unmeant obliviousness of their existence. Unbeknownst to many people even in Oman, Maimani is one unique case that merits exploration. Due to some unsubstantiated linguistic and ethnic considerations, Maimani is often mistakenly viewed as a dialect diverging from Baluchi, an Indo-Iranian language spoken in Oman as well as other homeland countries such as Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. This paper, to that effect, is an attempt to cast some light on this understudied language and to bring it some due notice. A closer look at a sample of its lexicon based on the Swadesh one hundred word list reveals that Maimani has a slight portion of shared lexical items with Baluchi and a minimal degree of mutual intelligibility. Contrary to expectation, Maimani has plenty of common lexical items with Lawati, another nearby member of the Indo-Iranian language family that is not commonly linked to Maimani. The findings show that Maimani lexical resemblance and mutual intelligibility to Lawati is greatly significant that they appear to be dichotomous varieties branching from the same language.

Keywords**:** Maimani, Lawati, Oman, Indo-Iranian, minority languages

1. Introduction

For several decades, Oman has become an epitome of rich linguistic diversity with several languages and dialects coexisting with Arabic language. Affiliated with three language families, Swahili, Kumzari, Lawati, Harsusi, Jabbali, Mehri, Zadjali, Baluchi, Bathari, and Hobyot are all spoken in Oman with some indigenous to Oman (Al Jahdhami, 2015). Due to shared lexical items among languages affiliating with the same language family, they are often referred to as dialects rather than distinct fully-fledged languages of their own. Zadjali, for instance, is often erroneously considered a variety of Baluchi rather than a language of its own (Al Jahdhami, 2017). The restricted use of these languages to the home domain as opposed to other vital domains adds significantly to solidifying such view. The indispensable need of Arabic to fit into the society forces towards more use and exposure to Arabic compared to these ethnicity languages. With the advent of modern life and technology, English has also played its role in marginalizing the need for these languages among their speakers which, in turn, poses a question of great significance concerning their threatened status in prospect. Uniquely among these languages is the Maimani language, a name that hardly rings a bell to many individuals, even locals of Oman. In the Omani context, Maimani is mainly known as a tribe and rarely, if ever, as a language. Similarly, scholarly work addressing languages in Oman makes no mention of Maimani as a language, let alone addressing its history and structure. The present paper therefore attempts to unveil this language, draw more attention to it, and situate it among other languages spoken in Oman.

2. Literature Review

Languages in Oman have recently gained special attention both locally and globally, especially that their status of endangerment requires the attention of concerned linguists and native speakers alike. Diverse numbers of their speaker base, extent of interest shown by their speakers towards intergenerational transmission to posterity, and restricted domain of use put them all at risk though with different degrees (Al Jahdhami, 2015). Academic work addressing these languages varies from one language to another. While some have academic work geared towards studying them, others are not mentioned as part of the languages spoken in Oman. Scholarly work addressing endangered languages whether in the Middle East or elsewhere such as Hetzron (1997), Brenzinger (1998), Krauss (1998), Janse (2003), Ersteegh et al., (2006), Owen (2007), Comrie (2009), Anonby & Yousefian (2011), BenKharafa (2013), and Horesh (2019) makes no reference to some of these

languages, namely Maimani and Zadjali. Peterson (2004) made reference to fourteen different languages spoken in Oman in the eighties of the twentieth century. He namely lists Swahili, Jabbali, Mehri, Lawati, Guirati, Zadjali, Baluchi, Harsusi, Hikmani, Bathari and Hobyot. Maimani is dropped as one of these languages probably due to its unknowability among many locals of Oman, let alone among foreign researchers. In fact, brining Maimani to light is a terra incognita, for academic written work on Maimani, to my knowledge, has not come into existence neither in Arabic nor in English. Therefore, this study depended mainly on oral sayings of its speakers and collecting raw data in an attempt to unearth and provide a foreground for academic work on Maimani.

Maimani is the mother tongue of the Maimani people, a small ethnicity scattered in several places in Oman, namely in Muscat and AlBatinah. The big majority of Maimani speakers is concentrated in Matrah and Qurayyat. Reliable statistics on the number of Maimani speakers do not exist; the best guesstimate made by its speakers suggests that it is spoken by around two to three thousand speakers, most of whom are from the elderly group. They also make reference to Maimani community members in some Arab countries like Iraq and Saudi Arabia as well as non-Arab countries such as India, Pakistan and Indonesia. The origin of Maimanis is contested; some Maimanis define themselves as a sub-group of the Baluchi ethnicity that migrated from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran whereas others believe that they are a distinct group of their own whose lineage is traced back to the Arab ancestry. The former view has played a key role in portraying their ethnicity language as one variety of Baluchi, an Indo-Iranian language brought to Oman by immigrants from the Baluchistan area, namely Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan (Spooner, 2012; The Omani Encyclopaedia, 2013).

Extraordinarily, Maimani appeared to be nearer to Lawati than to Baluchi. Derived from the name of its community, Lawati or Lawatiyya is one of the Indo-Iranian languages spoken in Oman by an ethno-linguistic group in Muscat and AlBatina (Salman & Kharusi, 2011). It is spoken by the Lawatis who are believed to have migrated from Sindh and settled in Oman more than 400 years ago (Peterson, 2004; Valeri, 2010). Beside its familiar name 'Lawati' taken from the name of its speakers 'Lawatis', Lawati is also known among its local community as Khoja, a derivative borrowed from Persian which signifies 'a fellow member of the tribe' (The Omani Encyclopaedia, 2013). Although the Lawati community is estimated to be few thousands, some of the community members have a passive knowledge of Lawati while others do not know it in any manner (Al

Jahdhami, 2015). Young fluent speakers of Lawati are very rare indeed since the majority of fluent speakers nowadays are from the elderly age group, mostly those over their fifties.

Likewise the lineage of Maimani, the origin of the name itself is also subject to debate. One group believes that it came from the name of the Arab country ‘Yemen’, in reference to the homeland from which Maimanis are believed to have migrated from. Another view takes the name ‘Maimani’ back to the Arabic word ‘yumn’ (blessings). A third one stipulates that Maimanis are named after their great grandfather ‘Maimon’ who is of an Arab descent. Proponents of this view highlight that their ancestors were Arab descendants of ‘Maimon’ who migrated to ancient India in pursuit of livelihood and thus settled there due to flourishing trade. Yet, immigrant Maimanis did not deracinate themselves from their rooting even though they had to adopt a new language and culture. A small number of Mainmanis, however, favoured to return to their homeland due to nostalgia and deep rooting to their Arab ancestry and native homeland.

It is truly worth investigating whether these different views on the pedigree of Maimanis represent different groups in the first place. Having two ethnicities with the same title/designation does not necessarily entitle that they belong to the same origin, nor does it entitle their diverse origin. It is not uncommon in the Omani context to have tribes and/or sub-tribes with the same designation, but with each traced back to different origins. For instance, there are two tribes with the name ‘Farsi’ albeit with two different origins. One of these groups defines itself as a tribe of Arab descent and views itself as different from the other group that is traced back to the Baluch descendants. Other examples are Wahibis, Sa’adis, Hashmis, Jabris and Alawis.

Another intriguing and worth-posing question here is whether Maimani is related to the Memoni language spoken by the Memoni community in some areas of Pakistan (Ali, 2015). Although a look into some lexical items from both languages shows some resemblance, it is presumptuous at this stage to give any assumption on whether Memoni and Maimani are two varieties of the same language or two completely different languages. The same holds true for the Memoni and Maimani communities, especially that the lineage of the Maimani people is debated as mentioned above. In fact, the lack of reliable documented work makes it difficult to stand on one view over another. The final say on this matter is thus subject to further research and scrutiny.

3. Language Status

The sum of languages existing in the world nowadays is hard to pinpoint; it is estimated, however, to be six to seven thousand living languages. An older estimation given by Grimes (2000) reports around 6809 languages scattered in different parts of the globe, as exemplified in the underneath table. Thirty-two percent of these languages are in Asia with the total number of 2197 languages. A more recent estimation reveals that about 7151 languages are spoken around the world with 3045 in the verge of endangerment (Ethnologue, 2022). A pivotal question to be addressed here concerns how many languages will be alive in the course of time, as it is agreed upon globally that language loss is happening in an unprecedented rate. Another worth-posing question often addressed by linguists who are concerned with languages of minority speakers centres around what makes a language endangered and what optimal measures to be taken to avoid such loss, especially that linguists concerned do not seem to be in accord in this regard (Hetzron, 1997; Brenzinger, 1998; Janse, 2003; Comrie, 2009; BenKharafa, 2013; Saiegh-Haddad et al., 2014; Horesh, 2019)

Table 1: The distribution of languages in the different continents of the world (Grimes, 2000)

	Total living languages	**Percentage**
The Americas	1013	15%
Africa	2058	30%
Europe	230	3%
Asia	2197	32%
The Pacific	1311	19%
Total	6809	

Lack of consensus is also attested in the terminologies used to refer to language loss and the proposed scales to measure such loss; various terms such as language endangerment, language death, language threat, language attrition and language moribundity are cited in literature (Warum, 1991; Brinzinger, 1998; Fishman, 1998; Grenoble & Whaley, 1998; Krauss, 1998; Comrie, 2009; BenKharafa, 2013; Saiegh-Haddad et al., 2014; Khrisat & Al-Harthy, 2015; Horesh, 2019). Other linguists, contrastingly, proclaim that such terms/scales are frown upon, for they portray a gloomy picture of an imminent death of these languages, taking no consideration of the feelings of their speakers. Instead, they opt for a more sanguine scale that measures degrees of language vitality rather than degrees of language endangerment (Brinzinger, 1998; Grenoble & Whaley, 1998; Comrie, 2009). Irrespective of the proposed scales, agreement can be easily perceived in the

extreme ends of these scales (e.g. safe versus extinct or vital versus dead) whereas the in-between stages do not seem to be agreed upon in these scales.

Six levels of language endangerment are mostly cited in literature: safe, at risk, disappearing, moribund, nearly extinct and extinct (Grenoble & Whaley, 1998; Crystal, 2000). A '*safe*' language is the one used by all generations and in all domains. It has a large speaker base and may have an official status used in government and education. A language '*at risk*' is a vital language with no observable shrink in its speaker base. It lacks, however, features of safe languages due to its use in restricted domains and its smaller numbers of speakers as opposed to other languages in the same area. A language is considered as '*disappearing*' if it is used in a restricted set of domains along with an observable shift to another language spoken nearby. There is also a shrink in the speaker base and in inter-generational transmission. A '*moribund*' language is the one that lacks inter-generational transmission to younger generations. A language is considered as '*nearly extinct*' when it has a very small number of speakers, most of whom are from the elderly age group. And an '*extinct*' language is the one that has no speakers left (Warum, 1991; Brinzinger, 1998; Fishman, 1998; Grenoble & Whaley, 1998; Krauss, 1998; Comrie, 2009; Brinzinger, 2015).

Languages susceptible to endangerment are of two types: minority indigenous languages and immigrant languages. Contrary to minority indigenous languages, immigrant languages are not in much danger as they may have a robust community in their homelands (Grenoble & Whaley, 1998; Comrie, 2009; Anonby & Yousefian, 2011; Saiegh-Haddad et al., 2014; Horesh, 2019). Concern is more shown to the ones that are endangered in their homelands due to language contact, among other factors, with the dominant language, which results in a gradual decrease in their speaker base. Language contact with the dominant language may impose a gradual language shift to the dominant language, leading to a decrease in the number of speakers. A concrete case in the Omani context is the language shift Zadjali has undergone to Baluchi. A substantial number of Zadjali speakers have abandoned their language in favour of Baluchi due to its wider domain of communication and larger speaker base as opposed to their ethnic language (Al Jahdhami, 2017).

Assessing the status of a language requires scrutinizing a synergy of aspects that may collectively play a role in its overall situation such as the number of speakers, their language proficiency, domains of use, and the extent of inter-generational transmission (Brenzinger, 1998; Krauss, 2007; Comrie, 2009; Saiegh-Haddad et al., 2014). As far as language endangerment is

concerned, Al Jahdhami (2015) proposes three levels to measure the status of minority languages spoken in Oman: *definitely endangered languages, severely endangered languages*, and *critically endangered languages*. Definitely endangered suggests that the elder speakers of a certain language may pass on the language to children albeit with a gradual decrease in the inter-generational transmission in reality. The latter, however, may not use the language among themselves or no longer learn it as mother tongue. Severely endangered suggests that a language is mainly used by grandparents and parents. Some parents, however, do not use it as a medium of communication neither among themselves nor with their children. Language shift to another language feeds into an observable shrink in the speaker base. Critically endangered suggests that a language has a very small speaker base of namely grandparents and parents. Its speakers use it partially and infrequently but do not pass it on to their children. Assessing minority languages spoken in Oman based on these benchmarks shows that they are scattered over these three levels. Baluchi, Mehri, Swahili and Jabali fall into the definitely endangered group, Lawati, Kumzari and Harusis fall into the severely endangered one and Zadjali, Bathari and Hobyot reside into the critically endangered group (Al Jahdhami, 2015).

Assessing Maimani in light of these very benchmarks reveals that it is does not fall as an exception to other minority languages spoken in Oman. Its small number of speakers (estimated to be two to three thousand speakers) renders its status far from being safe. The big bulk of these speakers are from the elderly age group including semispeakers who have low language proficiency as opposed to fluent speakers. Second, its use is restricted to the home domain with no use in other domains other than home. Likewise, there is an observable decrease in intergenerational transmission to younger Maimanis as speakers of Maimani, parents in particular, see no extrinsic motive to exert effort and pass it on to their posterity. Besides, there is a certain degree of language shift to languages of wider communication and official functions such as Arabic or other nearby minority languages. Given the above mentioned facts, Maimani seems to fit into the '*disappearing*' level of language endangerment, or alternatively the '*critically endangered*' category. Put forthrightly, whichever category Miamani falls in, it is endangered in some way, for a language is considered engendered when it is not safe.

4. Methodology

The study is based on the Swadesh framework commonly used to measure lexical similarities among languages, especially those of the same language family. Native speakers of three languages (Maimani, Lawati, and Baluchi) were asked to provide equivalents to the Swadesh one hundred word list. Subjects were asked to listen to the collected lexical items from languages other than theirs to measure their familiarity with these items. Mutual intelligibility to the one hundred words was measured based on subjects' response to a word recognition question either as '*recognized*' or '*unrecognized*'. Words were transcribed phonemically and marked either as recognized or unrecognized. Subjects were also asked to converse with each other about different topics using their own native languages. They were asked to report their intelligibility to the other language used by the counterpart subjects.

5. Findings

A comparison between Baluchi and Maimani using the one hundred word list framework shows that the amount of shared (recognized) lexical items is very minimal, making around 10% of the items under investigation as opposed to 90% of discrepant ones. Recognized words are marked in bold in contrast with those unrecognized ones shown in normal font in the underneath table. Likewise, measuring mutual intelligibility between the speakers of these two languages shows that they could grasp some bits and pieces of the utterances used by the speakers of the other language. Yet, such a low rate of intelligibility does not allow what can be considered '*mutual*' intelligibility. It is reported that such minimal grasp rests on the similarities between the two languages in some shared lexical items, which suggests that Maimani is not a dialect of Baluchi, as usually presumed due to unsubstantiated factors, but rather a distinct language of its own.

Table 2: Equivalents to the Swadesh one hundred wordlist in Maimani and Baluchi respectively.

S.No.	Swadesh	Maimani	Baluchi
1	I	ama:ja	ma:/man
2	you	**tuh**	**ta:/tɔ:**
3	we	asa:	ma/sadʒi
4	this	hi	eh
5	that	hi	a:
6	who	ker	kaj/kaja
7	what	kurili	tʃi
8	not	**na**	**na:**

9	all	sabbih	kɔl/ drɔ:
10	many	Wadi/gunuh	ba:z
11	one	hakkuh	jak
12	two	ɓuh	du/dɔ:
13	big	waɗuh	mɛzan/mazan
14	long	ɗiguh	dra:dʒ
15	small	nanduh	kɛsɔn/kasa:n
16	woman	ɓa:jri	dʒɛnen / dʒan
17	man	**mard**	**marden/mardan**
18	person	ma:ruh	bɛmard/mardɔm
19	fish	mahtʃɪh	ma:hi/ ma:hig
20	bird	dʒɪlkʰri	mɔrg
21	dog	kʊttuh	kʊtʃɪk/ kʊtʃɛk
22	louse	dʒujuh- dʒuj	bɔ:t/ bɔ:d
23	tree	naxl	dratʃk
24	seed	da:nuh	tɔm
25	leaf	warquh	ta:g
26	root	dʒantah	agɔnd
27	bark (of a tree)	kantuh	pɔst
28	skin	ʃa:mrɪ	pɔst
29	flesh	**gɔ:hʃɪt**	**gɔdʒɪd/ gɔ:ʃt**
30	blood	raṱ	hɔ:n
31	bone	**haɗuh**	**had**
32	grease	ʃarbi	pig
33	egg	a:nuh	heg
34	(animal) horn	sɪŋ	kɔnt
35	tail	**dumb**	**bɔnd/ dɔm**
36	feather	pa*kʰ*ah	ba:l
37	hair	wa:r	pʊt/ mɪd
38	head	matʰu	sar
39	ear	kʰan	gɔʃ/ gɔ:ʃ
40	eye	akʰah	tʃam
41	nose	ɲak	pɔ:z
42	mouth	wa:t	daf/ dam
43	tooth	**ɗand**	**dantɔn/ danda:n**
44	tongue	**zuban**	**zwɔ:n/ zɔba:n**
45	fingernail	nuh	mɔrdɔ:naŋ/ na:kun
46	foot	**padʒ**	**pa:d**
47	knee	munuh	kɔnd/ kɔn
48	hand	hatʰ	dast
49	belly	beʈʰ	la:f
50	neck	niri	gardan
51	chest	ʃa:tih	gwa:r
52	heart	**dɪl**	**dɪl**
53	liver	betuh	dʒɛgar/ dɪgar
54	drink (V)	bjetuh	wa:rt/ waragɪ
55	eat (V)	kaɪtʊh	wa:/ waragɪ
56	bite (V)	ʃʰakudʒituh	gartʃɪ/kasɪ
57	see (V)	ɲja:retuh	tʃa:rɪ/ tʃa:ragɪ
58	hear (V)	sanetuh	ɛʃkɔ/ɪʃkanagɪ
59	know (V)	ɓʊdʒetuh	zɔ:/ za:nagɪ
60	sleep (V)	sʊmmetuh	wɛpt / wapsagɪ
61	die (V)	maretuh	mɔ/ maragɪ
62	kill (V)	ma:retuh	kɔʃ /kɔʃagɪ
63	swim (V)	weɲdʒetuh	dʒɔnʃɔtʃɛ/ʒaʃɔ:dagɪ

64	fly (V)	uɗeuh	ba:lɪkɔ/ba:lkanagɪ
65	walk (V)	ha:ljtuh	ɛra: / laha:lawagɪ
66	come (V)	aʃetuh	a:tk/ pedaɪ
67	lie (down) (V)	aram karituh	blet
68	sit (V)	vjetu	bnɪnd / nɛndagɪ
69	stand (V)	ubjetuh	ɛtʃa:θ/ ɔ:ʃtagɪ
70	give (V)	ɗjetʊh	da:θ/ deagɪ
71	say (V)	ʃʰejetuh	watʃi/ gɔ:ʃagɪ
72	burn (V)	ɓa:retuh	sɔtk/asrɔkaragɪ
73	sun	dih	rutʃ
74	moon	ʃand	ma:h
75	star	ta:rʊh	ɛsta:r/ sɛtarɛh
76	water	pa:ni	a:f/a:p
77	rain	mih	ha:wʊr/ hɔ:r
78	stone	bahnuh	dɔk/ dɔ:g
79	sand	ra:juh	ha:k
80	earth	zamin	dɛgar/ zamin
81	cloud	mla:r	ɪstin/ karkar
82	smoke	duxan	kɛʃɪ
83	fire	ʈʰa:nduh	a:s
84	ash	rama:dih	pɔr/ pɔ:r
85	path	wa:t	rɛh/ ra:hah
86	mountain	dʒabalih	kɔh/ kɔ:h
87	red	rat̪u	sɔhr/ sɔ:hɔ:r
88	green	sa:w	sabz
89	yellow	hajdah	zard
90	white	aʃuh	speθ/ sapɛt
91	black	ka:ruh	sja:h
92	night	radʒuh	ʃaf
93	hot	kuhsuh	garmɛ/ garm
94	cold	ʈʰaɖuh	sa:rt/ sard
95	full	bar*d*ʒjuh	pɔrɛ/ pʊrrɪ
96	new	na:w	nɔ:kɪ
97	good	uɲtʃuh	sa:rɛ/ ʃarrɪ
98	round	dwa:r	gɪrdɛ/ gard
99	dry	sʊkkujah	hɔʃkɛ/ hɔʃk
100	name	na:lʊh	nɔm/ na:m

Comparing Maimani to Lawati, however, yielded different outcomes. Despite the fact that Maimanis and Lawatis view themselves as two distinct unrelated ethnicities, a nearer look at their ethnicity languages reveals that both Maimani and Lawati share a great deal of lexical resemblance and a considerable rate of mutual intelligibility. Word recognition test of the one hundred wordlist under investigation revealed around 78% of recognized lexical items by native speakers of each language as opposed to 22% of unrecognized ones. The following table gives the equivalents of the Swadesh word list in Maimani and Lawati respectively. Unrecognized lexical items are marked in bold whereas recognized ones are shown in normal font.

Table 3: Equivalents to the Swadesh one hundred word list in Maimani and Lawati respectively.

S.No.	Swadesh	Maimani	Lawati
1	I	ama:ja	a:m
2	you	tuh	tɔ:
3	we	asa:	asa:
4	this	hi	hi
5	that	hi	hu
6	who	ker	ker
7	what	**kurili**	**kʊrʊ**
8	not	na	na
9	all	sabbih	sɪbbi
10	many	**Wadi**/gunuh	gana/ganu
11	one	hakkuh	hakku
12	two	ɓuh	ɓa:
13	big	waɗuh	waɗu
14	long	ɗiguh	ɗɪgu
15	small	nanduh	nandu
16	woman	ɓa:jri	ɓa:jri
17	man	mard	mard
18	person	ma:ruh	ma:ru
19	fish	mahtʃɪh	matʃɪ
20	bird	dʒɪlk^hri	dʒɪlk^hri
21	dog	kʊttuh	kʊttu
22	louse	dʒujuh- dʒuj	dʒujn
23	tree	naxl	naxɪl
24	seed	da:nuh	da:nu
25	leaf	**warquh**	**ka:gɪr**
26	root	**dʒantah**	**ta:ri**
27	bark (of a tree)	**kantuh**	**nes**
28	skin	ʃa:mrɪ	dʒa:mrɪ
29	flesh	gɔ:hʃɪt	gɔ:ʃɪt
30	blood	rat̪	rat̪
31	bone	haɗuh	haɗu
32	grease	ʃarbi	tʃarbi
33	egg	a:nuh	a:nu
34	(animal) horn	sɪŋ	sɪŋ
35	tail	**dumb**	**butʃ**
36	feather	**pa*k^h*ah**	**pɔ:r**
37	hair	wa:r	wa:ra
38	head	mat^{h}u	mat^{h}u
39	ear	k^han	k^han
40	eye	ak^{h}ah	ak^{h}i
41	nose	ɲak	ɲak
42	mouth	wa:t	wa:t
43	tooth	ɗand	ɗandɔ:
44	tongue	**zuban**	**ɠɪb**
45	fingernail	nuh	nɔ:
46	foot	padʒ	paʄ
47	knee	munuh	munu
48	hand	hat^h	hat^h
49	belly	beʈ^h	beʈ^h
50	neck	**niri**	**gardɪn**
51	chest	ʃa:tih	tʃa:ti
52	heart	dɪl	dɪl
53	liver	betuh	beʈu

54	drink (V)	bjetuh	bjetu
55	eat (V)	kaɪtʊh	kaɪtʊ
56	bite (V)	**ʃʰakudʒituh**	**tʃʰaktʊvɪdʒɛ**
57	see (V)	ɲja:retuh	ɲja:retu
58	hear (V)	sanetuh	sʊnetu
59	know (V)	ɓʊdʒetuh	ɓʊdʒetu
60	sleep (V)	sʊmmetuh	sʊmmetu
61	die (V)	maretuh	maretu
62	kill (V)	ma:retuh	ma:retu
63	Swim (V)	weɲdʒetuh	veɲdʒetu
64	fly (V)	uɗeuh	uɗetu
65	walk (V)	**ha:ljtuh**	**langetu**
66	come (V)	aʃetuh	atʃetu
67	lie (down) (V)	**aram karituh**	**letetu**
68	sit (V)	vjetu	vjetu
69	stand (V)	ubjetuh	ubjetu
70	give (V)	ɗjetʊh	ɗjetʊ
71	say (V)	ʃʰejetuh	tʃʰejtu
72	burn (V)	ɓa:retuh	ɓa:retu
73	sun	**dih**	**sʊɖ**
74	moon	ʃand	dʒand
75	star	ta:rʊh	ta:rʊ
76	water	pa:ni	pa:ni
77	rain	mih	mi
78	stone	**bahnuh**	**batʰar**
79	sand	ra:juh	ra:j
80	earth	zamin	zɪmin
81	cloud	**mla:r**	**wa:ɖja**
82	smoke	**duxan**	**ɖuh**
83	fire	ʈʰa:nduh	ʈʰa:du
84	ash	**rama:dih**	**pʊlja:r**
85	path	**wa:t**	**rastu**
86	mountain	**dʒabalih**	**ɗʊngʊr**
87	red	rat̪u	rat̪u
88	green	sa:w	sa:w
89	yellow	hajdah	hajdu
90	white	aʃuh	atʃu
91	black	ka:ruh	ka:ru
92	night	**radʒuh**	**ra:t**
93	hot	**kuhsuh**	**garm**
94	cold	ʈʰaɖuh	ʈʰaɖu
95	full	**bar*d*ʒjuh**	**dʒakka:r**
96	new	na:w	naw
97	good	uɲtʃuh	uɲtʃu
98	round	**dwa:r**	**tʃʰaklɪ**
99	dry	sʊkkujah	sʊkku
100	name	na:lʊh	na:lʊ

Likewise, subjects of both languages reported a significant rate of mutual intelligibility to the language used by their counterpart subjects. Speakers of both languages estimated their mutual intelligibility to the utterances used by the other interlocutors to be around 70 to 80%. The following table shows some sample phrases/sentences from both languages written in phonemic transcriptions as well as in Arabic adopted scripts and diacritics.

Table 4: Sample phrases/sentences in Maimani and Lawati.

Phonemic transcription	**Translation**	**Phrases/sentences in Arabic adapted script**
/s̱abbaħkʊm allah bɪlxer/	Good morning	صبحكم الله بالخير
/kɪnjɛ tɛj tabit/	How are you?	كين يْيْ تَيْ تَبيت؟
/kʊr vɛj tɛj na:lʊ/	What is your name?	كور ڤْيْ تَيْ نالو؟
/kɪtri ja: ma:rɛ taji/	How old are you?	كيتري يا ماريْ تَيي؟
/kɪtetʊ rejʔih/	Where do you live?	كيتيْتو ريْ إيه؟
/kɪtetʊ vɪnjɛ/	Where are you going?	كيتيْتو ڤين يي؟
/kade aɪjɪ hɪttɛh/	When did you come here?	كاديْ آييْ هِي تتيْه؟
/tu bɛllɔ utʃʊ ma:rʔɔjih/	You are a nice person.	تو بيْلّو أوتشو مارأو يِه
/xʊʃtʊm tɔku bʊdʒa ijih/	It was nice meeting you.	خوشتم توْكوْ بودچا إيِيه
/merbani/	Thank you	مير باني

6. Discussion

The very small proportion of words recognized by speakers of Maimani and Baluchi is in sync with the degree of mutual intelligibility between the two languages. It gives more support to the stand that Maimani is not a variety of Baluchi though they may have some common lexical items. Maimani is rather closer to Lawati than to Baluchi. Word recognition of the targeted lexical items is substantially high as speakers of Maimani and Lawati were able to recognize the big majority of the lexical items under investigation, precisely 78%. Likewise, mutual intelligibility to the utterances used by speakers of the counterpart language goes in line with the amount of recognized words. Subjects suggested 70 to 80% of mutual intelligibility when involved in conversations of their own. Recognized word forms ranged from using the same lexical items verbatim to minimal segmental change of various forms such as vocalic and consonantal alternation as well as segmental deletion or addition. The underneath tables illustrate these segmental variants marked in bold.

Table 5: Vocalic alternation in shared lexical items between Maimani and Lawati.

Maimani	Lawati	Gloss
t**u**h	t**ɔ:**	You
h**i**	h**u**	That
s**a**bbih	s**ɪ**bbi	All
g**u**nuh	g**a**nu	Many
ɓ**u**h	ɓ**a:**	Two
akʰ**a**h	akʰ**i**	Eye
n**u**h	n**ɔ:**	Fingernail
z**a**min	z**ɪ**min	Earth
hajd**a**h	hajd**u**	Yellow

Table 6: Segmental deletion/addition in shared lexical items between Maimani and Lawati.

Maimani	Lawati	Gloss
am**a:ja**	a:m	I
ra:j**uh**	ra:j	Sand
ma**h**tʃɪh	matʃɪ	Fish
dʒuj	dʒuj**n**	Louse
naxl	nax**ɪ**l	Tree
gɔ:**h**ʃɪt	gɔ:ʃɪt	Flesh
wa:r	wa:**ra**	Hair
ɗand	ɗand**ɔ:**	Tooth
ʈʰa:**n**duh	ʈʰa:du	Fire
sʊkku**jah**	sʊkku	Dry

Table 7: Consonantal alternation in shared lexical items between Maimani and Lawati.

Maimani	Lawati	Gloss
ʃa:mrɪ	**dʒ**a:mrɪ	Skin
ʃarbi	**tʃ**arbi	Grease
pa**dʒ**	pa**ʄ**	Foot
ʃa:tih	**tʃ**a:ti	Chest
weɲdʒetuh	**v**eɲdʒetu	Swim
a**ʃ**etuh	a**tʃ**etu	Come
ʃʰejetuh	**tʃʰ**ejtu	Say
ʃand	**dʒ**and	Moon
a**ʃ**uh	a**tʃ**u	White

Table 8: Maimani word final /h/ vs. Lawati word final /Ø/ alternation.

Maimani	**Lawati**	**Gloss**
tu**h**	tɔ:	You
sabbi**h**	sɪbbi	All
gunu**h**	ganu	Many
hakku**h**	hakku	One
ɓu**h**	ɓa:	Two
waɗu**h**	waɗu	Big
ɗigu**h**	ɗigu	Long
nandu**h**	nandu	Small
ma:ru**h**	ma:ru	Person
mahtʃɪ**h**	matʃɪ	Fish
da:nu**h**	da:nu	Seed
haɗu**h**	haɗu	Bone
a:nu**h**	a:nu	Egg
nu**h**	nɔ:	Fingernail
munu**h**	munu	Knee
betu**h**	beʈu	Liver
bjetu**h**	bjetu	Drink
kaɪtʊ**h**	kaɪtʊ	Eat
ɲja:retu**h**	ɲja:retu	See
sanetu**h**	sʊnetu	Hear
ɓʊdʒetu**h**	ɓʊdʒetu	Know
sʊmmetu**h**	sʊmmetu	Sleep
maretu**h**	maretu	Die
ma:retu**h**	ma:retu	Kill
weɲdʒetu**h**	veɲdʒetu	Swim
uɗeu**h**	uɗetu	Fly
aʃetu**h**	atʃetu	Come
vjetu**h**	vjetu	Sit
ubjetu**h**	ubjetu	Stand
ɗjetʊ**h**	ɗjetʊ	Give
ʃʰejetu**h**	tʃʰejtu	Say
ɓa:retu**h**	ɓa:retu	Burn
ta:rʊ**h**	ta:rʊ	Star
mi**h**	mi	Rain
ʈʰa:ndu**h**	ʈʰa:du	Fire
hajda**h**	hajdu	Yellow
aʃu**h**	atʃu	White
ka:ru**h**	ka:ru	Black
ʈʰaɖu**h**	ʈʰaɖu	Cold
uɲtʃu**h**	uɲtʃu	Good
na:lu**h**	na:lʊ	Name

The considerable amount of recognized lexical items (78%) vis a vis with the low number of unrecognized ones (22 %) gives an insight into some type of relatedness between Maimani and Lawati. Equally, the minimal segmental changes in some of the shared lexical items suggests a dialectal variation that could occur in several aspects of any language. A compelling question here addresses the discrepancy between the Maimani word final /h/ and the absence of word final /h/ in Lawati in some shared lexical items. As both Maimani and Lawati are revealed to be dichotomous

varieties originating from the same language, the possibility that the former established word final /h/ addition or else the latter developed word final /h/ deletion can be considered. The following examples illustrate both possibilities.

Proposed original form		Form with word final /h/ addition	(Maimani)
haɗu	→	haɗu+h	
ɓa:retu	→	ɓa:retu+h	
ta:rʊ	→	ta:rʊ+h	
hakku	→	hakku+h	

Proposed original form		Form with word final /h/ deletion	(Lawati)
haɗuh	→	haɗu+Ø	
ɓa:retuh	→	ɓa:retu+Ø	
ta:rʊh	→	ta:rʊ+Ø	
hakkuh	→	hakku+Ø	

Given that both languages share an ample number of lexical items alongside the great extent of mutual intelligibility, a question to be addressed here is whether or not they should be considered two dialects of the same language. Although the terms '*language*' and '*dialect*' are sometimes used interchangeably, research shows that these two terms are not always unequivocal to define and their borders are not always easy to demarcate (Milroy & Milory, 1997; Romaine 2000). Dialects are often defined as several forms of mutually intelligible varieties of the same language that exhibit differences in the phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and/ or semantic levels (Wolfram, 1998; Burton, 2007). This suggests that a language could refer to a collection of different dialects or could refer to a language with one and only one dialect. Differences mainly marked in the phonological features are referred to as an '*accent*' such as those exhibited by native speakers of English in different geographical proximities. A dialect is often linked with the informal variety that is seen as the non-standard or the substandard form of language whereas a language is usually viewed as the prestigious variety that has a standard written form (Wardhaugh, 2000).

Linguistically, mutual intelligibility is mainly used as the rule of thumb in differentiating between languages and dialects. Two varieties that are mutually intelligible are classified as dialects whereas those mutually unintelligible are classified as languages. This criterion, however, is sometimes overridden by other factors. Chinese, for example, has different mutually

unintelligible varieties, but it is considered as one language due to political and social factors (Wang, 1997; Wardhaugh, 2000). Another problematic issue is what is known as '*dialect continuum*' that exhibits various degrees of mutual intelligibility between several speech communities. Speakers of a certain variety comprehend the speech of those residing nearby, but those at the two extreme ends do not comprehend each other's variety. A famous cited example is the dialect continuum exhibited from northern France to southern Italy (Hudson, 1996; Chambers & Trudgill, 1998).

The great lexical resemblance between Maimani and Lawati supported by the high level of mutual intelligibility gives more support to the position that they are two varieties branching from the same language source. Yet, the exhibited similarities between Maimani and Lawati vis a vis with the fact that these ethnicities consider themselves distinct from one another pose a question whether they were two varieties undergoing a form of convergence due to some sort of language contact. Languages in contact, especially those of the same language families, are likely to affect one another in various forms, resulting in several similarities in different spheres such as phonology and lexicon. In the course of time, more features of one dialect may be replaced by its own speakers with features of another dialect. Such convergence is usually attested in more salient features between the varieties as speakers try to eliminate differences to foster a homogeneous variety (Winford, 2003).

To sum up, the above findings on the shared lexical items and the high rate of mutual intelligibility give more support to the standpoint that Maimani and Lawati are two varieties of the same language rather than two separate languages. In view of that, it can be said that Maimani belongs to the Indo-Iranian language family realm. More accurately, Maimani and Lawati appear to be two language varieties of the same origin spoken by two distinct ethnicities. Both seem to be traced back to the same language, but each has developed its own features in the phonological and lexical level. Further academic work investigating other aspects such as phonemic inventories, morphological structure, and syntactic features would surely give more decisive outcomes to several unanswered questions. It is likewise worth exploring whether Maimanis and Lawatis are related one way or another due to the great resemblances between their ethnicity languages. Tracing back their pedigrees might give an insight into whether their origins cross at some point in time, or whether they happen to speak the same language due to geographical proximity of both ethnicities. Further research addressing such issues is equally significant.

7. Conclusion

This paper is a humble endeavour to cast some light on Maimani language, a lesser known minority language spoken in Oman. Lack of scholarly work addressing Maimani makes its existence unbeknownst to many individuals both locally and globally. Speakers of Maimani are often considered a sub-group of the Baluch ethnicity, and so is their ethnicity language considered a variety of the Baluchi Language. A look into a selected sample of their lexicon based on the Swadesh wordlist framework, however, reveals little shared lexical items, and a minimal degree of mutual intelligibility between them. In contrast, investigating the same sample of lexical items in Maimani and Lawati, another nearby Indo-Iranian language spoken in Oman, reveals plenty of shared lexical items between the two languages. Such lexical resemblance permits a certain degree of mutual intelligibility between Maimani and Lawati, which suggests a noteworthy connection between them. Such commonalities, therefore, give more support to the viewpoint that they are two varieties that have branched from the same mother language. It is noteworthy, however, that the limitation of the present study to the lexical level alongside its small number of investigated lexical items suggests the need for further studies that investigate other aspects of the language. A more comprehensive and deeper investigation of various aspects at the phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical level would certainly aid to yield more decisive outcomes.

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