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Dawoodi (Pakistan) – Language Snapshot

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Language Name:	Dawoodi (also known as Domaaki, Domaki, Dumaaki, Dumaki)
Language Family:	Indo-European → Indo-Iranian → Indo-Aryan
ISO 639-3 Code:	dmk
Glottolog Code:	doma1260
Population:	fewer than 1,000 speakers
Location:	35.701005, 71.694859 (Hunza valley, Gilgit-Baltistan)
Vitality rating:	EGIDS 8b (nearly extinct)

Summary

Dawoodi is a severely endangered Indo-Aryan language spoken in Mominabad and Domyal villages, located in Hunza and Nager valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan. Dawoodi speakers are known as Dom or Dooma and formerly worked as blacksmiths and musicians. Nowadays, they are involved in various other professions. Dawoodi is closely related to geographically-isolated Indo-Aryan languages like Romani and Domari spoken in Europe and Western Asia. There are few existing detailed descriptions of Dawoodi. The current status of Dawoodi as a severely endangered language calls for urgent work on a detailed phonetic description of its various phonological contrasts, a task which the author is currently involved in.

Summary (Urdu)

داؤدی ایک شدید خطرے سے دوچار ہند آریائی زبان ہے جو مومن آباد اور ڈومیل کے دیہاتوں میں بولی جاتی ہے، جو گلگت بلتستان، شمالی پاکستان کے ہنزہ اور نگر کی وادیوں میں واقع ہیں۔ داؤدی کے اہل زبان ڈوم یا ڈوما کے نام سے جانے جاتے ہیں اور اس سے پہلے وہ لوہاروں اور موسیقاروں کی حیثیت سے کام کرتے تھے۔ آج کل وہ دوسرے مختلف پیشوں میں شامل ہیں۔ داؤدی کا جغرافیائی طور پر الگ تہلگ ہند آریائی زبانوں سے تعلق ہے جیسا کہ رومانی اور ڈوماری جو یورپ اور مغربی ایشیاء میں بولی جاتی ہیں۔ داؤدی کے بارے میں صرف چند مفصل صراحتیں موجود ہیں۔ اس وقت ایک انتہائی خطرے سے دوچار زبان کی حیثیت سے داؤدی کے مختلف صوتیاتی امتیازات کی مفصل صوتیاتی تصریح پر فوری کام کرنے کی ضرورت ہے، جس پر مصنف فی الوقت کام کر رہا ہے۔

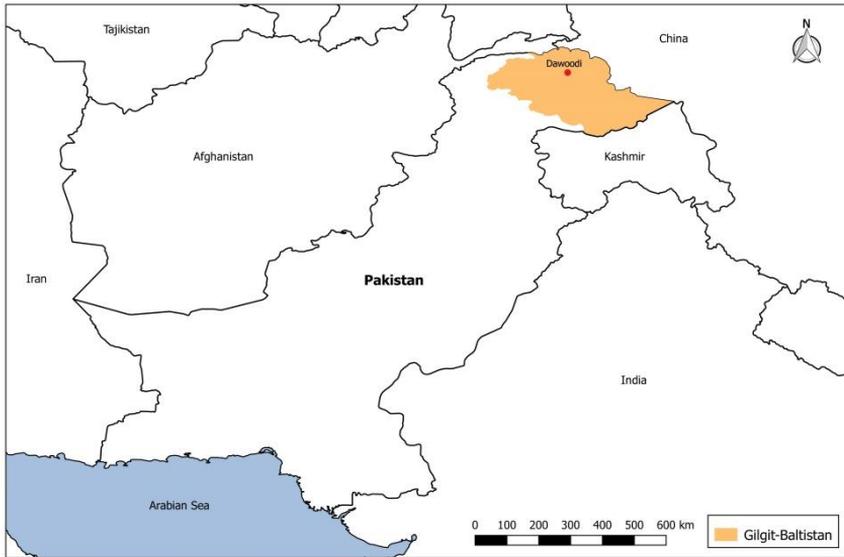


Figure 1. Map indicating the approximate location where Dawoodi speakers reside (Hunza valley, Gilgit-Baltistan). (c) 2020 by Qandeel Hussain

A full scale version of this map is on page 137.

1. Overview

Dawoodi is a severely endangered Indo-Aryan language spoken in Mominabad and Domyal villages, located in the Hunza and Nager valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan (Backstrom & Radloff 1992; Moseley 2010; Tikkanen 2011). From a genetic and historical perspective, Dawoodi belongs to the Central group of Indo-Aryan languages (Buddruss 1985). In the current literature, Dawoodi is known as *Domaaki/Domaki* and *Dumaaki/Dumaki* (Lorimer 1939; Weinreich 2010). The word *Domaaki* originated from an Old Indo-Aryan word *domba* which literally means *a man of low caste living by singing and music* (Turner 1966: 313). *Domaaki* speakers are known as *Dom* or *Dooma* and formerly worked as blacksmiths and musicians. Nowadays, they are involved in various other professions (Weinreich 2010). Due to negative stereotypes associated with their professions (Schmid 2007), *Domaaki* speakers hesitate to call themselves *Dom* (Backstrom & Radloff 1992). The language name *Dawoodi* has been recently adopted by the community as they started affiliating themselves with *Dawood* or *David*.¹ Most speakers today prefer *Dawoodi*, which will be the name used here.

Several studies have reported Dawoodi as a dying language that is largely spoken by elderly members of the community (Saxena 2008). The younger generation is no longer fluent in Dawoodi (Schmid 2007), and there are currently around 350 middle-aged and older speakers (based on surveys conducted in 1995 and 2004; Weinreich 2010).

2. Language contact and migration

There are reports that Dawoodi speakers migrated from Kashmir via Baltistan (Lorimer 1937; Weinreich 2008). Dawoodi speakers now reside in the most linguistically diverse area of Northern Pakistan (Weinreich 2010; Torwali 2020) and are surrounded by speakers of Burushaski (isolate), Shina (Dardic), and Wakhi (Iranian). Dawoodi speakers are bilingual in Shina and Burushaski, both of which are widely spoken in the Gilgit region and Hunza valley. The younger generation can also speak Urdu and English, which are taught at local schools. The Hunza valley is a hotspot of tourism and attracts thousands of tourists annually, which creates the opportunity for the local communities to get into contact with other major languages of Pakistan as well.

¹ *Dawood* and *David* refer to one of the prophets in Islam and also known as one of the kings of Jerusalem in Judaism.

Dawoodi is closely related to geographically-isolated Indo-Aryan languages like Romani and Domari. The former is spoken across Europe (Matras 1995) and the latter has several minority communities in Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Egypt (Matras 2012). According to Saxena (2008: 224), Dawoodi is a ‘language of great scientific interest because there is some evidence that it is related to Romani, the gypsy language, but further research is needed.’ Physical genetic studies have revealed that the ancestry of the Roma populations residing in Europe can be traced back to the Indian subcontinent, further supporting the suggestion that Dawoodi, Domari, and Romani populations have a shared ancestry (Rai *et al.* 2012).

3. Key features of Dawoodi

Although Dawoodi belongs to the Central group of Indo-Aryan languages, it has been heavily influenced by the neighboring languages. Lorimer (1939) observed a large number of Burushaski and Shina elements in Dawoodi’s lexicon, which are probably due to contact, rather than shared inheritance. Since Dawoodi speakers are now also fluent in Urdu, a national language of Pakistan, Arabic and Persian words have entered the lexicon as well, most likely via Urdu. The phonological structure of Dawoodi appears to be similar to Burushaski and Shina. The status of voiceless aspirated stops (e.g., /p^h t^h k^h/) is still controversial (Lorimer 1939), but preliminary findings by the current author suggest that there is a three-way laryngeal contrast of plain voiceless, voiceless aspirated, and voiced stops. Moreover, dental and retroflex affricates are phonemic in Dawoodi but are absent in other languages of the Central group. The vowel system is closely related to the major Indo-Aryan languages (e.g., Hindi and Punjabi) which contrast /i e ε a ə ɔ o u/. Other key features of Dawoodi include SOV word order, and rich gender and case systems (Rönnqvist 2015; Weinreich 2008, 2011). Dawoodi is a highly concatenative language. Case is marked through suffixation on nouns and by using ablaut in masculine declensions (Rönnqvist 2015; Tikkanen 2011).

4. Available literature

The first comprehensive grammar of Dawoodi was written by Lorimer (1939). Backstrom & Radloff (1992) conducted a sociolinguistic survey of Northern Pakistan and highlighted the causes behind the decline of Dawoodi. Schmid (1997) investigated the social and cultural aspects of the Dawoodi community (see also Schmid 2007). Weinreich (2010) discussed the current situation and ongoing language shift of the Dawoodi speakers towards Burushaski. Recent studies have investigated specific aspects of Dawoodi more directly: Weinreich (2008, 2011) presented data on the

dialectal and phonological/grammatical aspects of Dawoodi. Tikkanen (2011) studied the noun inflection and case system of Dawoodi. Based on the grammatical analyses of Weinreich (2011, 2008) and Tikkanen (2011), Lange (2015) presented a brief account of the nominal plural marking, and Rönqvist (2015) examined fusion, exponence, and flexivity in Dawoodi. It is worth noting that the findings of these previous studies were based on the sociolinguistic surveys (Backstrom & Radloff 1992), grammatical descriptions (Lange 2015; Lorimer 1939; Rönqvist 2015; Tikkanen 2011; Weinreich 2008, 2011), and impressionistic phonetic analyses (Weinreich 2011). There are no published materials on the phonetic description and oral literature of Dawoodi. An account of the numeral system of Dawoodi is available online in the database of Numeral Systems of the World's Languages.²

5. Current research

The current status of Dawoodi as a severely endangered language calls for detailed phonetic description of various phonological contrasts, a project which the author is involved in (Hussain 2018). A wide range of phonetic tools are also being developed for processing the speech data of endangered Indo-Aryan languages. The findings of this project will help inform phonetic and phonological typology in South Asia.³

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² <https://mpi-lingweb.shh.mpg.de/numeral/Domaaki.htm> (accessed 2020-09-22)

³ A US National Science Foundation project on the documentation of Dawoodi is also underway.
https://nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1664396&HistoricalAwards=false (accessed 2020-09-22)

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Figure 1. Map indicating the approximate location where Dawoodi speakers reside (Hunza valley, Gilgit-Baltistan). (c) 2020 by Qandeel Hussain

This is a full scale version of a smaller map on page 131.