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THE ROOSTER IS CALLING: *SUK* IN NORTHERN TALYSHI

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While numerous significant works on Iranian etymology and historical lexicology have emerged since the end of the 19th century, and several important etymological dictionaries on Iranian languages were published at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries (such as V. Rastorgueva and D. Edelman’s “Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Languages”, R. Tsabolov’s “Etymological Dictionary of the Kurdish Language”, J. Cheung’s “Etymological Dictionary of the Iranian Verb”), there is still no dedicated work on the history of Talyshi vocabulary. Only a small portion of the Talyshi inherited lexicon has been subjected to etymological analysis, either in some of the aforementioned works as Talyshi cognates or in various papers addressing diverse issues of Iranian historical lexicography. This paper represents an attempt to investigate the origin of the word *suk* meaning ‘rooster’ in Talyshi, a subject that has not been examined from an etymological perspective in works dealing with Iranian linguistics.

Keywords: Talyshi, etymology, vocabulary, animal term, Iranian linguistics

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1. Introduction

Northern Talyshi, one of the dialectical groups within the Talyshi language¹, a New Northwestern Iranian language, is spoken in both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan². Over time, this linguistic community has been significantly influenced by Persian and Azerbaijani, the official and predominant languages of these nations. This prolonged exposure has led to the assimilation of a considerable number of Persian and Azerbaijani terms into the Talyshi lexicon. Moreover, these languages have served as intermediaries through which words of Arabic, Russian, and European origin found their way into Talyshi vocabulary. Despite these linguistic interactions, the basic vocabulary of Northern Talyshi predominantly comprises native Talyshi words, many of which can be traced back to Old Iranian roots. While some of these lexical units have undergone scrutiny in etymological dictionaries and various works on Iranian historical lexicography, others have transparent and evident

¹ The Talyshi language comprises various dialects traditionally classified into three main groups: Northern, Central, and Southern, see: [Bazin 1980, Stilo 1981, Yarshater 1996]. Within these dialects, differences extend beyond grammatical nuances, such as the presence of progressive (continuous) tenses in the Central and Southern dialects, contrasting with their absence in Northern Talyshi. Phonological distinctions are also evident, exemplified by the correspondence of the Northern Talyshi ‘*h*’ to ‘*x*’ in Southern Talyshi, a phonetic shift seen in several instances as a Southwestern Iranian sound change traceable to Old Iranian **xw*. Throughout this paper, the term “Northern Talyshi” is predominantly used when discussing vocabulary and phonological developments. This choice stems from the primary reliance on language data collected during fieldwork in Anbarān (Ardabil, Islamic Republic of Iran) and various published language materials pertaining to Northern Talyshi spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Limited availability of data on Central and Southern Talyshi dialects makes it challenging to verify the attestation of relevant lexical units in these dialects. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the term *suk* is common across all three Talyshi dialectical groups, see: [Paul 2011, 32].

² Northern Talyshi is mainly spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan, specifically in Lankaran, Lerik, Masally, and Yardymly regions [Clifton, Tieszen, Deckinga, Lucht 2005, 3]. However, some of its dialects can also be found in Iran, in the provinces of Gilan and Ardabil.

etymologies, making them suitable for inclusion in an etymological dictionary of Talyshi. However, these well-established etymologies might not be of significant interest in scholarly works focused on Iranian studies. Yet, the Talyshi vocabulary encompasses a broad spectrum of words whose origins remain either unidentified or are believed to be Iranian, displaying characteristics that deviate from the typical Northwestern Iranian and internal Talyshi phonological developments.

Although the Talyshi language has captured the attention of Iranists for more than two centuries, resulting in the publication of a substantial body of works, significant gaps persist within this field that require attention. One notable void is the absence of comprehensive etymological studies on Talyshi, which could not only illuminate the historical evolution of words within the language but also serve as a valuable tool for addressing issues in related languages belonging to the same language family. This paper endeavors to take a modest step towards addressing this gap by proposing an etymology for the Talyshi word *suk*, meaning ‘rooster’, which has yet to undergo thorough etymological analysis.

2. Animal terms in Northern Talyshi

The semantic field encompassing animal terms in the basic vocabulary of Northern Talyshi is predominantly indigenous. The majority of animal names trace their origins to Old Iranian roots, exhibiting regular phonological developments characteristic of Northwestern Iranian languages. Additionally, as well as sound changes unique to Northern Talyshi, e.g. *səpa* ‘dog’ < OIr. **spaka-*, *āsp* ‘horse’ < OIr. **aswa-*, *go* ‘cow’ < OIr. **gaw-*, *pas* ‘sheep’ < OIr. **pasu-* ‘small cattle’ [Rastorgueva 1990, 128], *va* ‘lamb’ < OIr. **wara-* [Abayev 1989, 87], *bəz* ‘goat’ < OIr. *būza-* [Rastorgueva, Edelman 2003, 191–192], *kāg* ‘hen’ < OIr. **kṛka-* ‘rooster, hen’ [Edelman 2011, 398], *rəvos* ‘fox’ < OIr. **raupāsa-*, *hərs* ‘bear’ < OIr. **rša-/arša-* [Edelman 2020, 460], *muž* (*mužna*, *mežuna*) ‘ant’ < OIr. **marwi-či-* [Edelman 2015, 246], *muš* ‘rat’ < OIr. *mūš-* ‘mouse, rat’ [Edelman 2015, 395] etc.

In addition to native lexical units, the semantic field of Northern Talyshi animal terms also includes a small number of loanwords from

Persian, Arabic, and Turkic. Animal names borrowed from Persian³ encompass terms such as: *palang* ‘tiger’, cf. NP. *palang* ‘leopard’ < OIr. *prdanaka-* [Edelman 2020, 175; Abayev 1958, 450], *neči* ‘wolf’, cf. NP. *naxčir* ‘hunt, hunting’ < OIr. **naxčir-*⁴, *paranda* ‘bird’, cf. NP. *parande* < present stem of *paridan* ‘to fly’ + agentive suffix *-ande*, *āhu*⁵ ‘gazelle’, cf. *āhu* ‘gazelle, antelope’ < OIr. **āsu-ka-* ‘fast’ [Rastorgueva, Edelman 2000, 315–316; Rastorgueva 1990, 127], etc.

Animal terms of Arabic origin are likely indirect loanwords, introduced to Northern Talyshi through Persian mediation, e.g. *hayvon* ‘animal’, cf. NP. *hayvān* < Ar. *ḥayawān*, *maymun* ‘monkey’, cf. NP. *maymun* < Ar. *maymūn*.

Given the prolonged contact of Northern Talyshi with both Persian and Turkic, including Azari in Iran and Azerbaijani in the Republic of Azerbaijan, it incorporates Turkic animal terms directly and indirectly through Persian. Examples include: *dava* ‘camel’, cf. Az. *dəvə*, *bāyğuş* ‘owl’, cf. Az. *bayquş*, *ğāz* ‘goose’, cf. Az. *qāz*, NP. *ğāz*, *tula* ‘hunting dog’, cf. Az. *tula*.

³ In some instances, distinguishing between native Talyshi words and Persian borrowings poses a challenge, given the substantial overlap in phonological changes between Talyshi and Persian, both being Western Iranian languages. Greater confidence in identifying a borrowing arises when a word exhibits irregular sound development, either diverging from typical Northwestern Iranian languages or aligning with Persian phonological patterns.

⁴ Bailey derives this word from OIr. **naxti-čičra-* ‘originating in night’, “with allusion to the epithet Zor.Pahl. *tam-tōxmak* (a translation of Av. *təmasčičra*) ‘originating in darkness’ applied to the wild beasts in Zoroastrian terminology” [Bailey 1946, 774]. In contrast, Edelman proposes an alternative origin, tracing the word back to Old Iranian **naxu-ščarya-* ‘the best hunter’s trophy’ [Edelman 2003, 122].

⁵ This is evidently a loanword from Southwestern Iranian (Persian). In native Northern Talyshi words, the Old Iranian intervocalic **s* typically retains its form as *s*, whereas in Southwestern Iranian languages, it transforms into *h*, e.g. OIr. **raupāsa-* ‘fox’ > NP. *rəvos* ‘fox’, NP. *rubāh* ‘fox’, OIr. **pasu-* ‘small cattle’ > NP. *pas* ‘sheep’, MP. *pah* ‘sheep’ [Rastorgueva 1990]. Additionally, the Old Iranian **ā* consistently changes to *o* in Northern Talyshi. Therefore, the native Northern Talyshi word for ‘gazelle’ would be *osu* instead of *āhu*.

Notably, some animal terms have not been reported previously. One such example is the bird name ‘suk’ for ‘rooster’, which will be discussed below.

3. *Suk* ‘rooster’

In Proto-Indo-European, the domestic fowl was denoted by an onomatopoeic name stemming from the root *k^[h]erk^[h] [Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1984, 601]. Ačaryan contends that “Indo-Europeans didn’t know the rooster. It came from India for the first time, and various nations gave it various names” [Ačaryan 1971, 368–369]. According to John P. Peters, the absence of a common rooster name shared by Indians and Iranians indicates its unfamiliarity to them before the separation of these two Aryan stocks⁶. Iranians likely domesticated the rooster between the 11th and 8th centuries BC [Peters 1913, 379–380].

In several later Iranian languages and dialects, the derivative form of the Old Iranian root *kr̥ka-, initially used for both rooster and hen, begins to specifically refer to the hen. This semantic shift is evident in Northern Talyshi (kāg ‘hen’ < OIr. *kr̥ka-) and the majority of New Iranian languages where the names for hen trace back to this root, such as Maz. kerk, Gil. kār̥k, Zaz. kār̥g/kār̥ge, and others⁷.

The word used to refer to the rooster in Northern Talyshi is *suk*. Given that there is no homophonous word in the neighboring non-Northwestern Iranian languages for naming any kind of animals and

⁶ In his work, Peters refines this statement by noting that Prof. A. V. William Jackson drew his attention to the observation “that Kahrka, which appears in composition in Avestan Kahrkatāt, the popular onomatopoeic term for the cock, and in Kahrkāsa, the name for the vulture, apparently as ‘chicken-eater’, may be equated with the Sanskrit kr̥ka (also onomatopoeic) in kr̥ka-vāku, also a folk name for the cock. With these, (following P. Horn, Grundriß der neupersischen Etymologie, p. 189), he also compares the Pahlavi Kark, Kurdish Kurka, Ossetic Kharkh, meaning ‘hen’. The suggestion is that there was an onomatopoeic root name for the cock common to Indian and Iranian, which did not, however, independently become the name of the cock in either Sanskrit or Avestan, although found in later Iranian dialects” [Peters 1913, 379].

⁷ See: [Hasandust 2011, 310–311] for the examples in other Iranian languages and dialects.

considering that the majority of Northern Talyshi animal terms are indigenous, it is reasonable to assume that *suk* is an inherited Talyshi word of Iranian origin. The rules of diachronic phonological development in Northern Talyshi suggest that *suk* can be traced back to OIr. **sauka-*, an *-a* derivative from OIr. **sauk-/*sauč-* ‘to call’ (cf. OIr. *gauša-* ‘ear’ < OIr. **gauš-* ‘to hear, to listen’ > NT. *guš* ‘ear’ [Rastorgueva, Edelman 2007, 247–250], OIr. *bauda-* ‘smell, odor’ < OIr. *baud-* ‘to smell’ > NT. *bu* ‘smell, odor’, OIr. **maiza-* ‘urine’ < OIr. **maiz-* ‘to urinate’ > NT. *miz* ‘urine (animal)’ etc.).

The Old Iranian voiceless alveolar fricative **s* in word-initial prevocalic position consistently appears as ‘s’ in Northern Talyshi. For instance, OIr. **sarah-* ‘head’ > NT. *sa* ‘head’, OIr. **sarta-* ‘cold’ > NT. *sārd* ‘coldness’, OIr. **sata-* ‘hundred’ > NP. *sā* ‘hundred’ [Rastorgueva 1990, 201], OIr. **suxra-* > NT. *sə* ‘red’ [Tsabolov 2010, 276; Abayev 1979, 209] etc.

Another relevant phonological change supporting the proposed etymology of *suk* is that the close front⁸ rounded vowel *u* in Northern Talyshi predominantly⁹ derives from the Old Iranian diphthong **au*, e.g. NT *ruž* ‘day’ < OIr. **raučah-* ‘light’, NT. *ru* ‘river’ < OIr. **rautah-* ‘river, flow’ [Edelman 2020, 395], NT. *ruan* ‘oil, fat’ < OIr. **raugna-* ‘oil, fat’, NT. *kāvu* ‘blue, green’ < OIr. **kapauta-* [Edelman 2011, 243] etc.

The Old Iranian non-initial intervocalic or postvocalic (as well as after **r/*r̥*) voiceless velar stop **k* typically undergoes a change to *g* in Northern Talyshi. Consequently, the expected development of Old Iranian **sauka-* would be *sug* rather than *suk*. However, the preservation of Old Iranian intervocalic or postvocalic **k* in Northern Talyshi is not uncommon, e.g. OIr. **čakāta-* ‘forehead, mountain top, peak’ > NT. *čakud/čakut* ‘forehead’, OIr. **čakuš-* ‘hammer, thrown weapon’ >

⁸ The vowel ‘u’ exhibits considerable variation in backness, predominantly appearing as a back vowel in Southern Talyshi dialects, while in various varieties of Northern Talyshi, it is observed as both a back and front vowel. For further details, see: [Miller 1953, 45–49].

⁹ In a number of words NT. *u* goes back to OIr. *ū* and *u*, e.g. NT. *du* ‘smoke’ < OIr. **dūta-* ‘smoke’ [Rastorgueva 1990, 159], NT. *gu* ‘excrement’ < OIr. *gūθa-* [Rastorgueva, Edelman 2007, 294], NT. *dum* ‘tail’ < OIr. **duma-* ‘tail’ [Rastorgueva, Edelman 2003, 479].

NT. *čakuš/čakuj* ‘hammer’, OIr. **tantrya-ka-* ‘dark’ > NT. *toik* ‘dark’ [Rastorgueva 1990, 214]. Moreover, it is plausible that the *k* in *suk* could be the outcome of a secondary devoicing of the voiced velar stop *g*, a phenomenon also observed in some Northern Talyshi dialects. For example, OIr. **wṛka-* ‘wolf’ > NT. *vāg* ‘wolf’, but *vāk* in Astara [Pireyko 1976, 40; Pireyko 1991, 113], OIr. **hū-ka-* > **xū-ka-* ‘pig, boar’ > NT. *xug*, but *xuk* in Anbarān (potentially influenced by Persian).

The regular phonological development in Northern Talyshi includes the loss of the old final vowel, and in most cases, the apocopated vowel can be traced back to **a* (see all the above-provided examples with final **a*).

From a semantic perspective, the proposed etymon **sauka-* < **sauk-/sauč-* ‘to call’ [Cheung 2007, 340], ‘to proclaim’ (see: [Schwartz 1989, 294]) seems unproblematic. In many languages, the word used to refer to the rooster is related to verbs such as ‘to call’ or ‘to name’. Gamkrelidze and Ivanov suggest that poultry farming was likely poorly represented among the ancient Indo-Europeans, which explains the formation of names for poultry birds in separate dialects, making it challenging to trace them back to the common Indo-European era [Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1984, 602]. As Ačāryan notes, when the descendants of the old Indo-Europeans encountered the rooster, many names independently derived from verbs like ‘to call’, ‘to sing’, or ‘to speak’, e.g. Arm. *ak’atal* < **k’at-k’al*, Skt. *uṣa-kal-a*, OIrsh. *cailech*, Wlsh. *celioch* ‘rooster’, all going back to PIE. *kleh₁-* ‘to call’ [Ačāryan 1971, 368–369; Martirosyan 2010, 159]. Additionally, the Old Iranian root **xraus-*, from which (from the derivative **xrausa-* [Rastorgueva 1990, 219]) the words for rooster derive in many New Iranian languages, including NP. *xorus*, Taj. *xurus*, Bal. *krōs/kurus* [Edelman 2011, 401], Nn. *huros* [Cheung 2007, 449], Jow. *ru:s* [Cheung 2007, 449] etc.¹⁰, also means ‘to call’ [Cheung 2007, 448–449]¹¹.

Alongside Northern Talyshi, diminutive forms of *suk* with the suffixes *-le/-la* are also attested in Gilaki and Kajali as *sukle/sukule* and

¹⁰ See: [Hasandust 2011, 230–231] for New Iranian languages and dialects.

¹¹ See also: [Bailey 1979, 93].

sukala, respectively [Hasandust 2011, 230]. Considering that non-diminutive forms are absent in these languages and the primary word for rooster in Gilaki is *xurus* (see: [Kerimova, Mamedzade, Rastorgueva 1980, 270, 385; Rastorgueva et al. 2012, 273, 404; Rastorgueva, Edelman 1982, 489]), and the Old Iranian **au* typically becomes *o* in this language, it is highly probable that *suk* is a loanword from Talyshi into Gilaki (for Kajali, determining the word's origin is challenging due to limited language data). Notably, other names for birds or animal terms traced back to the Old Iranian **sauč*-/ **sauk*- in Iranian languages have not been identified¹². However, the Sanskrit term *śūka* for 'parrot', another bird renowned for its vocal characteristics, is related to this root, both ultimately tracing back to PIE **keuk*- 'to call, to cry' [Cheung 2007, 340].

In fact, in Proto-Iranian, there appears to be a homophonous verb to **sauk*-/ **sauč*- with the meaning 'to burn, to emit flames' [Cheung 2007, 338]. This verb, along with its derivative forms such as **sauka*- 'fire' [Abayev 1958, 485], burning' [Schwartz 1989, 293], **suxra*- 'glowing, red' [Rastorgueva 1990, 220], **suxta-ka*- 'sacred, pure' [Abayev 1979, 188], has been more extensively discussed in Iranological literature¹³. In Northern Talyshi, the words *sə* 'red', *sute* 'to

¹² Probably the only phonetically close animal term to *suk* is the word *sikā* 'duck, wild duck', found in Mazandarani, Gilaki, Sangesari, and Persian, see: [Hasandust 2011, 198]. However, it is likely that *sikā* has no etymological connection with *suk* and is more likely related to Sogd. *syčh* (**siyačā*) 'duck' and Sak. *siyā* 'goose' deriving from the root *sai*:-*si*- 'of grey color' [Hasandust 2014, 1811]; see also: [Bailey 1979, 42].

¹³ It is noteworthy that, for a considerable period, some Iranists believed that the Persian term NP. *sowgand* 'oath' derived from the root **sauk*-/ **sauč* 'to burn' and originally meant 'sulphur'. Mary Boyce, in her paper "On Mithra, Lord of Fire", asserted that the Persian expression *sōgand xordan* 'to swear an oath' literally translates to 'to drink sulphur' [Boyce 1975, 72]. She reiterated this statement in her entry "Ātaš" for Encyclopædia Iranica, see: [Boyce 1989, 1]. Abayev, in his Historico-Etymological Dictionary of Ossetic, claimed that Av. *saokānta* means 'sulphur', traces back to **sau-ka*-, and the Persian *sowgand xordan* literally means 'to drink sulphur' [Abayev 1979, 136]. However, Martin Schwartz debunked this belief in his paper "Pers. saugand xurdan, etc. 'to take an oath' (not *'to drink sulphur')", demonstrating that OIr. **saukanta*- originally meant 'oath' and comes from

burn, to burn down' trace back to this root. Therefore, one might suggest that *suk* 'rooster' could come from OIr. **sauka-* 'fire, burning'. However, unlike its homophone, this proposed connection seems less reliable from a semantic perspective. To my knowledge, no bird or other animal name in Iranian languages has evolved from OIr. roots meaning 'fire, flame, to burn', etc.¹⁴ Regarding the Sanskrit term for 'parrot', Mayrhofer argues that it hardly derives from *ŚOC* 'to burn, to glow, to shine' (because of its bright color) [Mayrhofer 1996, 644], the cognate of OIr. **sauk-/*sauč* 'to burn'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the hypothesis suggesting the derivation of *suk* 'rooster' from OIr. **sauka-* 'caller, calling' (< **sauk-/*sauč-* 'to call') appears quite compelling, considering both the historical phonological and semantic developments. As demonstrated, the OIr. **sauka-* could plausibly transform into *suk* through a combination of (North) western Iranian and internal Talyshi historical sound changes. While the conversion of **k > k* is somewhat irregular, it finds support in various inherited Talyshi words. The proposed etymology gains

OIr. **sauk-/*sauč-* 'to call, to proclaim' [Schwartz 1989, 293–294]. Regarding the term 'sulphur', the Old Iranian word to refer to it was not **saukanta-*, but **gaukr̥ta-*, as seen in NP. *gogird* and Sogd. *γōkt* both meaning 'sulphur' (ibid., see also: [Henning 1940, 398]).

¹⁴ The sole animal term in Iranian languages known to me that bears some connection to fire is the NP. *samandr* 'salamander'. Some Persian dictionaries suggest its derivation from *sām* ('fire') + *andar* ('in, inside'). However, Dehkhodā rejects this etymology, deeming it a folk explanation, and instead identifies it as a Greek borrowing, see: [Dehkhodā 1966, 632]. Certainly, beyond the Indo-Iranian language group, various animal names are linked to roots meaning 'fire' or 'flame'. Examples include Eng. *flamingo* < Pg. *flamengo* < *flama* 'flame' + Gmc. **iŋg*, named due to its vibrant plumage [Hoad 1996, 173], Rus. *ognjovka* 'fox breed with reddish fur' < *ogon* 'fire' + suffix *-jovka*, Arm. *hradodoš* 'fire-bellied toad' < *hur* 'fire' + *dodoš* 'toad', Arm. *hrat'it'er* 'pyralidae, snout moth' < *hur* 'fire' + *t'it'er* 'butterfly', as well as mythical Rus. *žar-ptica* 'Firebird', Arm. *hrahav, hrat'rčun* 'Firebird', etc. Nevertheless, these examples primarily pertain to recent innovations, taxonomic names, or folklore characters and provide limited support for **sauka-* 'fire, burning' as the root of *suk*.

credibility from a semantic perspective as well, given the consistent association of words denoting rooster with verbs like ‘to call, to speak, to sing’ across diverse Iranian languages, including Persian, Tajiki, Balochi, as well as other Indo-European languages such as Armenian, Old Irish, Welsh, Russian, German, etc.

List of abbreviations

Arm.	Armenian	MP.	Middle Persian	Pash.	Pashto
Av.	Avestan	Nn.	Nāini	Rus.	Russian
Az.	Azerbaijani	NP.	New Persian	Sak.	Saka
Bal.	Balochi	NT.	Northern Talyshi	Skt.	Sanskrit
Eng.	English	OIr.	Old Iranian	Sogd.	Sogdian
Gil.	Gilaki	OIrsh.	Old Irish	Taj.	Tajiki
Gmc.	Germanic	OP.	Old Persian	Wlsh.	Welsh
Jow.	Jowšaqāni	Pg.	Portuguese	Zaz.	Zazaki
Maz.	Mazanderani	PIE.	Proto-Indo-European	Zor. Pahl.	Zoroastrian Pahlavi

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Г. Авчян

ПШВЕНЬ КЛИЧЕ: *SUK* У ПШВНЧНОТАЛШСЬКШЙ МОВШ

Хоча з кшнця 19 столшття з'явилося чимало значущих робш з шранськшй етимологшй та шсторичнощ лексикологшй, ш були опублшкшванш декшлькш важливих етимологшчних словникшв шранськшх мов на початку 21 столшття (такшх як “Етимологшчний словник шранськшх мов” В. Расторгуевощ та Д. Едельман, “Етимологшчний словник курдськшй мовш” Р. Цаболова, “Етимологшчний словник шранськшго дшслова” Дж. Чеунга), досш вшдсутншй детальншй науковшй внесок у вивченнш шсторшй талшськшй лексики. Лише обмежена кшлькшсть талшськшх слшв була пшддана етимологшчному

аналізу, чи то як талиські когнати в зазначених роботах, чи в статтях, присвячених різноманітним аспектам іранської історичної лексикографії. Ця стаття є спробою дослідити походження слова *suk*, що має значення “півень” у талиській мові, – аспект, який досі не був детально розглянутий з етимологічної точки зору в роботах, присвячених іранській лінгвістиці.

Ключові слова: Талиська мова, етимологія, лексика, тваринний термін, іранська лінгвістика

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