

# **Persian Handbook**

## **Introduction**

Welcome to the study of Persian. This handbook is meant to serve as an introduction to strategies and resources that can assist a student in his or her study of the Persian language, and has been developed under the auspices of the National Middle East Language Resource Center ([NMELRC](#)).

The handbook is divided into four sections:

- (1) A brief introduction to the Persian language
- (2) Learning foreign languages in general and Persian in particular
- (3) Similarities between Persian and Arabic
- (4) Useful resources for the student of Persian including links to web-based resources

## **Section I: A Brief Introduction to Persian**

### **1.1 The Place of Persian Among the Families of Languages**

Persian is a member of the Indo-European family of languages. Indo-European is one of the most widely spoken and diverse families of languages in the world today. It includes, among others, the Romance languages (Spanish, French, Latin, etc.), the Slavic languages (Russian, Polish, etc.), the Germanic languages (English, German, Swedish, etc.), the Celtic languages, Baltic languages, Greek, Armenian, and Albanian. All of these languages, as well as some extinct languages like Tocharian and Illyrian, are thought to originate with a single prehistoric language called Proto-Indo-European, which was spoken between 3000 and 5000 years ago.

The branch of Indo-European that Persian belongs to is known as the Indo-Iranian or Indo-Aryan branch. It includes both the Indic languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, etc.) spoken in northern India today and the Iranian or (also called Aryan) languages. Persian is the most widely spoken of the Iranian languages today. Other modern-day Iranian languages include Pashto, which is spoken in much of Afghanistan; Tajik, spoken in Tajikistan; and Kurdish, which is spoken in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. There are also several Iranian languages spoken by certain tribes in Iran such as Luri, Baluchi, and Tat. In the past, there were other Iranian languages such as Avestan, the language of the Avesta, a sacred text of the Zoroastrian religion, which was the dominant religion in Iran before the Islamic conquest.

Persian has undergone many changes in the past two millennia, the most significant of which has most certainly been the influence of Arabic since the Islamic conquest of Persia in the year 650. Over the years, Persian has borrowed up to half of its vocabulary from Arabic as well as certain grammatical elements. This impact of Arabic is profound not only because of its magnitude but because the sounds and syntax of Arabic, a Semitic language, are so different than those of Persian. Since the Middle Ages, Persian has been written in a modified form of the Arabic alphabet, although in pre-Islamic times it was written in an older alphabet known as Pahlavi.

### **1.2 The Distribution of Persian**

Persian is mostly spoken in Iran. Only about half the population there speaks Persian as a native language, but virtually all educated Iranians are conversant in it. Persian is also spoken as a minority language in Afghanistan, Iraq, Tajikistan, and the Gulf states. In some of the Gulf states, it is spoken by more than 5% or even 10% of the population. In recent years, immigration from Iran has led to the creation of Persian speaking communities in many countries, especially the United States, Europe, Australia, and Israel. The largest urban community of Iranians outside of Iran is in the Los Angeles area, which boasts much Persian cultural life. The largest concentration of Persian speakers outside of Iran, however, is in Afghanistan. Persian speakers in Afghanistan tend to be local ethnic Pushtuns of a relatively educated urban background.

There are several dialects of Persian spoken today. Most are regional dialects spoken in different parts of Iran. A distinct dialect of Persian is also spoken in Afghanistan and a simplified dialect is spoken by people of Iranian descent living in the Gulf states. The most widely spoken dialect is the dialect spoken in Tehran. However, the type of Persian generally taught in schools and universities in Iran and around the world is the standard Dari dialect, which is understood by educated Iranians everywhere. Persian speakers in Afghanistan also call their dialect Dari, but it is distinct from standard Dari. The differences between Dari and Tehran Persian are not great. Some regional dialects may differ more. By and large, the situation is much more manageable than the state of diglossia existing between Modern Standard Arabic and regional dialects of Arabic.

### **1.3 Iranian vs. Persian Identity**

Iranian (also called Aryan) peoples first crossed the Indus River into the Iranian plateau almost 3000 years ago. The Persians have been the most influential of these peoples and their language has long since served as the common language among Aryans. The name Persian or Farsi is taken from the province of Fars in southern Iran. This region is the cradle of the Persian language and of the Persian empires of old. However, from their earliest days, the Persian empires were not merely Persian ethnic enterprises but conglomerate federations among various Aryan peoples. The name Iran is derived from “Aryan,” indicating a broader ethnic identity. The first Persian dynasty, the Achaemenids, began when Cyrus the Great united the Persians and the Medes in 550 B.C.E. Often, each people had their own king, while the Persian king was known as “king of kings of the Aryans.”

Thus the Iranian national identity has always been that of an ethnic federation and not a nation state. As a modern country, Iran was first known by Westerners as “Persia,” but Reza Shah Pahlavi officially changed it to “Iran” in 1935 to emphasize this difference. Since then, the name Irani or Iranian has come to refer to the civic identity of Iran as a country. The older Aryan remains a collective term for all ethnic groups who speak Iranian (Aryan) languages, many of whom, such as Pushtuns and Tajiks, are native to other countries.

Iran itself remains a multi-ethnic nation. Sizable minorities speak Azeri, Arabic, Kurdish, Armenian and other languages. Many of these groups are not Aryan. Many are not Shiite and some, like the Armenians, are not Muslims. Iran also has the largest Jewish community of any Muslim country today. Yet all Iranians call themselves Irani, regardless of their native language, ethnicity, or religion. This sense of purely civic identity is unique in the Middle East and has provided a national stability that has weathered well through much war and political instability. Despite other problems, Iran has seldom suffered inter-ethnic rivalry or secessionism. At the center of this stability, however, is the unquestioned supremacy of Persian. Iranians with no other ethnic background do not think of themselves as “ethnically Persian,” although this is technically what they are. All Iranians see Persian culture as their own, even if it is not their only culture. Persian is the official language of Iran and it is spoken by most of the population of over 67 million people even though it is the native language of only just

over half of them.

#### **1.4 Islamic vs. Persian Identity**

The Persian Sassanid dynasty that had been a dominant empire in the Middle East was defeated by the Muslim Arabs in the seventh century and Iranians enthusiastically embraced Islam. Persian language and culture went into a decline for several hundred years. During this time, Arabic was the language of study for both religious and secular purposes. Persian remained a spoken language only and even so was greatly influenced by Arabic. The earlier Persian writing system was forgotten, as was much of the pre-Islamic religion and folklore. Only in the tenth century did a number of Persian poets and intellectuals begin to use the Arabic writing system to write Persian. It was in this period that much of the “classical” Persian poetry was written by such poets as Hafez, Sa’di, and Ferdowsi. While all of these men were devout Muslims, they actively attempted to stem the flood of Arabic loanwords into Persian and also to revive and preserve certain cultural aspects of pre-Islamic Persian folklore. Ferdowsi’s epic *Shahnameh*, or “Book of Kings,” tells the legends of pre-Islamic Persian dynasties. There is little historic evidence of the kings described in the *Shahnameh*. The intention was clearly to create a mythic past within a Persian cultural tradition in a language as uninfluenced by Arabic as possible.

The history of Persian language, culture, and politics since the Middle Ages can be seen as a struggle between the Arab/Islamic and Persian/nativist identities. The country, the language, and the culture are inseparably both Persian and Islamic. On the one hand, the Arab conquest of Iran and the Arabic influence on Persian were followed by a resurgence of Persian cultural nationalism. However, this nativist rebirth led to a greater influence of Persian culture on the Arab and Islamic world as a whole, which led to a closer integration of Persian identity within Islam. In addition to exporting much of their own art (such as miniature painting), architecture, and legal traditions to the larger Islamic world, Persians also excelled in a number of crafts and innovations that were not originally Persian. Persian carpets, for instance, were adapted from traditional designs that had been introduced into the Islamic world via Turkic tribes from central Asia. However, the sophisticated workshops of the Medieval Persian cities set new standards and styles in the art form.

The Arabic writing system, which had been adopted from the Arabs, was also taken by Persian calligraphers to new levels. Persians even developed a particularly ornate calligraphic style, the so-called *nasta’liq shekasteh*, which is used almost exclusively for Persian. A semi-antique Persian carpet with *nasta’liq shekasteh* calligraphy can be seen at the top of this handbook.

The kings of the Safavid dynasty in the late Middle Ages attempted to remove their country from Arab political influence by converting from the majority Sunni Islam to the Shiite minority. This gave the Safavids independence from the rule of the Sunni Arab Caliphs. However, this new independence now made Iran into a new religious center for Shiites all over the Islamic world, as it remains to this day. It also allowed the Persian kings to engage in conquests of their own and create a sizable empire to the East. Unlike

the pre-Islamic Persian empires, which were largely Aramaic speaking, this new Islamic Persian empire brought the use of Persian as a language of state and high culture to the cities of Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. Thus, while Islam was the cause of the massive Arabic influence on the Persian language, it was also the cause of the spread of Persia outside of Iran for the first time in history. It is for this reason that Persian is still spoken among non-Iranians in Afghanistan and that Hindi to this day has so many Persian loanwords. Most of the Arabic loanwords in Hindi entered that language by way of Persian.

In the twentieth century, the kings of the Pahlavi dynasty sought to rid Iran of Arabic influence, including a campaign to replace Arabic loanwords with older Persian ones or new Persian words derived from native roots. Like the Medieval cultural nationalists, they were only partially successful. The Pahlavis also sought to use pre-Islamic Persian monarchical symbols to solidify their rule. This backfired terribly and was followed by a resurgence of Islamicist anti-monarchical sentiment, which culminated in the end of the monarchy and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the revolution of 1979. The new regime sought to re-emphasize the Islamic identity of Iran at the expense of its nativist identity. However, this campaign too was only partially successful. For instance, in the 1980s, the regime sought to suppress celebration of now Ruz, the traditional Zoroastrian New Year that most Iranians still celebrate as a national holiday. Iranian identity remains both Persian and Islamic at the same time. This duality is often inherent in the Persian language. In recent years, one can get a good idea of a Persian speaker's political orientation by counting how many Arabic loanwords he uses in public speech.

The dual nature of the Persian language is deeply ingrained, though. Just because Persian is so heavily influenced by Arabic does not mean that Persian speakers know Arabic. Khomeini himself once wrote a book in Arabic in order to solidify his credentials as an Islamic jurisprudent. However, Khomeini's conception of Arabic was so heavily Persian that the book later had to be "translated" into Arabic so that Arabs could understand it. At the same time, even those Persian speakers who attempt to consciously rid their speech of Arabic words are often unaware of just how many words of their language are of Arabic origin.

Given the heavy Arabic influence on Persian identity, foreigners might be forgiven for confusing Iranians with Arabs. However, there is no surer way to insult an Iranian than to call him an Arab.

## **Section II: Learning Foreign Languages in General and Persian in Particular**

### **2.1 How to study a foreign language**

#### **2.1.1 Knowing how to study a foreign language is a skill in itself**

While foreign languages may differ greatly one from another, the process of learning a foreign language always involves the same kinds of skills and techniques. One reason some people never learn a foreign language successfully is that they never learn how to go about it. They may possess all of the necessary abilities, but simply never apply them in the right way. In fact, no superhuman talents are required. It is a matter of finding the right attitude, the right people, and the right study habits. If you have had trouble learning foreign languages in the past, read this section carefully. Once you successfully acquire your first foreign language, you will discover that each new foreign language you learn is easier than the last.

The single most important factor in how effectively you will learn a foreign language is desire. Perhaps passion is a more appropriate word. The desire that will enable you to learn a foreign language needs to be the passionate desire familiar from other areas of life. Neither a romantic whim to learn a language nor a calculated decision of how important it is or how good it would be for you to learn it will be enough. What is required is physical passion for the language. Convincing the love of your life to marry you is probably easier (and quicker) for most people than successful acquisition of a foreign language.

The element of passion is perhaps especially significant for westerners studying Persian. Persian is not widely studied and those who choose to study it usually have very personal reasons. Some are so-called “heritage students” who have some prior knowledge of Persian from their family background. Others are students of the Middle East or Islam who have ventured off the beaten track of Arabic. Most have at least some knowledge of Arabic and many are fluent in a number of other languages. No one studies Persian by accident, and nearly all have some exposure to the world of Persian culture and have developed an emotional fascination with it. This should mean that students of Persian have a higher rate of success learning their target language than students of other foreign languages who just don’t want it as badly.

The second most important thing is a good teacher. Mere contact with native speakers is not enough. Children can learn any language well, even several languages at once, by the time they are six years old without any formal instruction just by being raised in an environment where the language is spoken. However, if you are older than six, this is no longer an option. As far as linguists can tell, something physical actually changes in your brain at this age. The few known cases of children who were raised in complete isolation or by animals and were only discovered after the age of six show that these children were never able to learn a human language later in life. This does not mean that you can never learn any new languages after the age of six. But it is highly suggestive that you cannot learn them by the same methods with which you learn your first language as a child. An

adult needs structure, grammatical structure as well as discipline, in order to assimilate the dizzying array of sounds and phrases that make up the language they are trying to learn. If you have a savant for languages, or if this is your third or fourth foreign language, you may get by with a good instructional book instead of a flesh-and-blood instructor. However, even accomplished polyglots will benefit from actual classroom experience. Everyone else should not do without it.

Finally, you should have contact with native speakers. This is absolutely necessary to mastering any language, but only once you have received some formal instruction. The more formal instruction you have, the more you will benefit from your contact with native speakers. Only after a large amount of both will additional formal instruction become superfluous. The best kind of native speaker to learn from is one you see every day. A boyfriend/girlfriend or spouse is simply the best way to learn any language, although this cannot and probably should not always be arranged on demand. A gang you can hang out with or a close friend is almost as good. A roommate or workmate is very good, too. Sometimes having close relations with native speakers in your own country can be more beneficial than being in a foreign country among strangers.

Whether you are traveling to a foreign country or not, creating an immersion-like environment is invaluable. Some people spend time in a foreign country but allow an English-speaking enclave to be created around them. Wherever you are, make a point of speaking your target language with anyone who can speak it with you, including fellow learners. Immerse yourself in the culture. If you like music, listen to music in your target language. Practice telling jokes in your target language. If you do pushups in the morning, count them in your target language. Don't be ashamed to carry flashcards or a small notebook around so you can drill your vocabulary while you wait in elevators, etc. If you are in a foreign country, write down unfamiliar words during the day so you can find out what they mean later. Remember the context you first saw the word in so that when you find out what it means, you will understand the context better, too. Learning in context is the best way to memorize anything.

Learning a new language is like developing a whole new set of muscles. You have to exercise a little every day and it may be a long time before you win any medals. The best thing you can do is to keep at it and the worst thing you can do is to quit because you're not a champion yet. You will often find yourself in pain. To paraphrase the athletes: pain is weakness leaving the mind. However, it also means you are not ready to go any further just yet. Be persistent, but be patient too.

### **2.1.2 How to pronounce a foreign language without sounding like a tourist**

If you are studying a foreign language as an adult, the chances that you will ever be able to speak it without any kind of traceable accent at all are close to zero. Even tiny variations in timing and intonation may be perceived by native speakers as some kind of "accent." However, there is still a huge difference between a glaring foreign accent and an idiosyncratic speaking style. If you have a harsh accent, you may not be understood, and even if you are understood, native speakers will never really open up to you as they

do with each other. They will never be able to forget even for an instant that you are foreigner. When a native speaker tells you that, “you speak my language very well,” they are in fact calling attention to your unusual pronunciation of it. Think about it. You never make such a comment to someone who speaks normally. A slight personal accent is another matter entirely. It means that native speakers do not have to struggle when they talk to you. You may not actually be able to pass as a native speaker, but they may forget there is anything foreign about you while you are talking to them. This makes all the difference in the world. Luckily, eliminating such a foreign accent is relatively simple and can and should be done by students already at the intermediate level.

What makes an accent gratingly foreign is a failure to learn the correct pronunciation of the sounds of the target language. Each language has a unique system of speech sounds. The sounds are usually represented by letters, although most languages have slightly more sounds than letters. The number one cause of a foreign accent is the learner’s retention of the sound system of his own language when speaking the target language. Do not despair. Both your own language and your target language have a finite number of speech sounds. Usually, neither language has more than fifty. Furthermore, the two languages may share a number of sounds. The main thing is to become aware of which sounds need your attention. The main problem is mental, not physical. All human beings have the same vocal tract and are capable of pronouncing the same sounds. With adequate practice, it shouldn’t take more than a few months to learn to produce any new sound. What takes far longer is the first step of perceiving the differences between the sounds of your language and the sounds of your target language.

Consider the two English words “sleep” and “slip.” These words differ only in the quality of their vowel. Many languages do not make this particular vowel distinction and students of English as a foreign language often pronounce these words the same. Usually they pronounce them both as sounding like “sleep.” At the very least, this mispronunciation makes them sound like foreigners a mile away. In the worst-case scenario, they may even be misunderstood (e.g., “I was sleeping in the shower”). In reality, it is not difficult for them to learn to pronounce the vowel in “slip.” The much more serious problem is that they cannot perceive that there is a difference in the first place even when English speakers pronounce the two words. Some students of English as a foreign language have insisted that there is no difference between the two vowels and that it is English speakers who are under the illusion that there is. This reaction is natural, but a failure to overcome it guarantees that you will have an uncomfortably foreign accent for years to come.

As an English speaker learning a foreign language, you are in the same situation as the foreigner who talks about “sleeping in the shower.” The obstacles you must overcome will differ depending on the language you are learning. However, the same strategies apply in all cases.

Learn what the sounds of your target language actually are. These may or may not correspond exactly to the letters of the alphabet of that language. Some sounds will be very unusual and different from any sounds in your own language. This actually makes

them easier to learn since you do not have to learn to perceive them as different from the sounds of your own language. It may take you a while to learn to produce a good trilled “r” in Spanish or the various “guttural” consonants of Arabic, but at least you will not suffer the confusion of trying to tell them apart from other sounds. Ask your teacher for tips on how to produce the sound physically. Practice producing the sound repeatedly as you walk along or wait for the bus. When you think you can produce the sound reliably in isolation, try repeatedly pronouncing entire words that contain it.

A more difficult situation is when the target language makes subtle distinctions that your own language does not. For instance, most Slavic languages distinguish between “hard” and “soft” versions of almost every consonant. Another example is the distinction between long and short vowels in languages like Arabic and Latin. At first, you may not even be able to perceive the difference. In cases like this, make a list of pairs of words that differ along the feature you are trying to learn. Listen carefully every time you hear a word from your list. If you can, get a native speaker to carefully pronounce words from your list and see if you can tell which is which. The more pairs of vocabulary items you memorize that differ along this feature, the more real the difference between the two sounds will seem to you. When perception of the difference is clear, production is never far behind.

The hardest cases of all are where the sound of the target language differs from the sound of your language by a small margin. For example, English tends to aspirate the sounds “p,” “t,” and “k” in a stressed syllable. Aspiration is a puff of air, sort of like an “h” following the sound in question. Many languages do not aspirate these sounds or aspirate them to a far lesser degree. As an English speaker, you will have a tendency to aspirate these sounds automatically without much control over the degree of aspiration. It will take along time to perceive exactly how much less aspiration the “p,” “t,” and “k” of your target language usually have. You will have to hear these sounds pronounced frequently by native speakers of the target language. If there is a native speaker you know well, you can practice imitating his or her particular pronunciation of certain words and comparing it with your own.

Finally, here’s a little tip to help with your Persian. The Persian letter “r” is often described as a trilled “r” like in Arabic. However, if you listen carefully, it is trilled like in Arabic only at the beginning of a word! In the middle of a word, it’s pronounced more like a tap, like the “tt” in the English word “battle.” At the end of the word, it trilled voicelessly, like the “re” in the French word “lettre,” but less throaty. These are subtle differences, but they make a big difference in improving your accent.

### **2.1.3 Tips for English speakers**

English is an unusual language in many ways. It’s actually quite exotic. There are a few particularly bizarre features of the English sound system that you will probably need to get rid of when studying any foreign language. Getting rid of sound patterns from your own language is similar to acquiring sound patterns of a foreign language, only in reverse. The hardest thing is learning to perceive the sound patterns of your own

language. Normally, you are not even aware you are making them. You must raise your awareness before you can make the decision to stop doing these things.

The number one sign of an American accent is the pronunciation of “r.” The American English pronunciation of “r” is actually more like a vowel than a consonant. Even British English tends to avoid this pronunciation. Many languages, like Italian and Russian, have an “r” that is trilled with the tip of the tongue. Other languages, like French and German, have an “r” that is trilled with the back of the tongue and sounds like a soft growling or purring noise. Whatever the language, when learning how to make their “r,” chances are it will not be the “r” of American English.

Another star culprit is the pronunciation of the vowels “o” and “u,” as in the English words “go” and “goo,” respectively. These vowels are very common among the languages of the world, and yet they are hardly ever pronounced as they are in English. English speakers pronounce these vowels very long, and usually end them with a “w” sound. This adds greatly to your accent in many languages. Practice pronouncing these words while making the vowels very short and not making a “w” sound at the end.

Another big factor in the American accent is the tendency to pronounce the sounds “d” and “t” identically between vowels after a stressed syllable. You may not realize that you do this, but you do. If someone recorded you saying, “There’s a chair and a ladder in there; the former is high and the latter is low,” and then cut out your pronunciations of “ladder” and “latter” and played them back to you, you would not be able to tell which was which. Once you realize you are doing this, you can begin not doing it when speaking your target language. If you do not make this distinction in your target language, you will sound funny at best. At worst, you might say something other than what you mean.

One final point is the distinction in English between so-called “light l” and “dark l” You are most probably not aware of this, but you pronounce the sound “l” differently in the words “let” and “lot.” In particular, the body of your tongue is down when you pronounce “l” before “e” or “i”, but it clings to the roof of your mouth when you pronounce “l” before “o” or “u” or at the end of a word. As an English speaker, you make this distinction automatically. Many languages do not make this distinction. In French, Spanish, and Persian, for instance, all “l”s are “light,” i.e., the tongue body is always down. If your attention has not been called to this, you will raise the body of your tongue automatically when you pronounce an “l” in certain positions. In this case, you do not run the risk of being misunderstood, but the effect is similar to wearing a T-shirt that says, “Say hello to Mr. American.”

There are many other such pitfalls. Some apply only to certain languages, others, like the ones above, probably apply to most languages. A good teacher will point these differences out to you. A bad teacher may not. In any case, don’t let yourself be the weak link in the learning chain. With the experience of more than one teacher and with increased exposure to the target language, you will pick up on more and more of these differences. It is worth making the effort. You do not need to learn to do anything new.

All you need to learn is when not to do certain things you are used to. The more you do this, the more easy and complete will be your entry into the world of your target language.

#### **2.1.4 How to read a text in a foreign language**

The two most important principles to remember when reading foreign texts are

- 1) Read every text three times.
- 2) Never write any translation on the text itself.

The first time you read a text, you should not use a dictionary. Simply read the whole thing from beginning to end and try to make the most of it. Not using a dictionary will force you to put to use all the knowledge you have. You may actually understand more than you would have with a dictionary. This will deepen your memory of words that until now you only knew tangentially. Even if you don't have time to read the text a second and third time, you will have gained something.

The second time you read a text, underline the words you still don't know and look them up as you read them in context. Write down their translations somewhere else: on flashcards or on a list. Do not write them onto the text itself. If you have read the entire text first without a dictionary, you will now find these words much easier to memorize because now you have a context for them. Even if you don't have time to read the text a third time, you will have made a better start towards committing the new words to long-term memory than if you had simply tried to memorize them cold from flash cards or from a list.

Before you read the text a third time, use the new words you have extracted from it to quiz yourself without looking at the text they are taken from. When you are confident you have learned most of them, read the text again without a dictionary. If you have done everything well, you should understand the text much better than you did the first time. If you still have some trouble, don't worry. This is probably simply the best you can do for the time being. Your abilities will improve as you read more texts. There is no reason to read any text more than three times. Doing so may result in unnecessary confusion.

Whatever you do, never, never write translations of words down on the text itself. If you do this, you will not learn the words nor will you understand the text very well. Even if you are simply cramming for a vocabulary quiz, you will do better if you write the words down separately. This rule should be as dear to you as keeping your PIN separate from your ATM. The results can be equally detrimental.

## 2.2 All About Dictionaries

### 2.2.1 How to choose a dictionary

In order to read texts and build a vocabulary you will need a good dictionary. First of all, what do we mean by a good dictionary?

Many foreign language dictionaries, and certainly most Persian-English dictionaries, are of the so-called “pocket-size” variety. Not all of these will actually fit into the pockets of most people, but they can be characterized as single-volume, squat, thick paperbacks. In recent years, some are electronic, but unfortunately this has not improved the situation much. Their entries almost always consist of a word in one language followed by a list of supposedly equivalent words in the other language, and little other information. While some pocket-size dictionaries are better than others, they are all rip-offs. If you use only a pocket-size dictionary, you will never reach even a moderate level of proficiency. If you have the good sense to use other means and do reach a moderate level of proficiency, you will soon realize that your old pocket-size dictionary is obsolete. In actual fact, it was not helping you much to begin with. Barring some very strange circumstances that are not within the usual experience of a student of foreign languages, there is never any good reason to acquire a pocket-size dictionary. If you already have one, get rid of it. It may become an excuse not to get a better dictionary, and this will hold you back from your potential.

The uselessness of pocket-size dictionaries is not just that they contain such a small number of entries that you will not be able to read normal, real-world texts in the target language. An even greater drawback is that the entries they do contain are so impoverished. There are no two languages such that each word in one language corresponds to exactly one other word in the other language. The sooner you disabuse yourself of this notion, the better. Each language divides the world up into words differently. A single word in one language may correspond to two or more completely different things in another language. Sometimes, it is easy for English speakers to differentiate them: if the difference is technical or only distinguishes a difference in degree. Some differences, however, are more conceptual and more difficult to grasp. For instance, some languages (yes, Persian is one of them) distinguish between countable “time” and non-countable “time.” In such languages, the word used in the phrase “one time” or “ten times” is a completely different word than that used in the phrase “olden times” or “space-time continuum.” Using one of these words in place of another may result in a sentence that is incomprehensible to a native speaker of the target language. As a speaker of English, learning to think of “time” as two different things can take a long time (of the non-countable variety). Learning to feel distinctions like this can be as difficult as learning to perceive differences between non-native sounds. However, all languages (including English) contain unique distinctions like this and learning to distinguish them is crucial to learning to speak and write. Pocket-size dictionaries are not only negligent in not informing you of such distinctions, they are actually malignant in encouraging you to think that words can be substituted from one language to another on a one-to-one basis.

A sentence can be translated because it provides a context. Sometimes, a good translation of a sentence may contain few of the original words. Except for some very narrow technical terms, words in isolation do not translate very well. A good dictionary does not translate words. It teaches you foreign words and tells how to use them. For each entry, it should have not a list of words but a paragraph explaining the differences between them. Preferably, it gives an example sentence for each word or type of usage. A good dictionary doesn't just tell you what a word means, it tells you how to use it. Often, how to use a word is a large part of what it means.

A good dictionary will also provide you with the grammatical information you will need to render a word intelligibly in context. The precise nature of this grammatical information will differ from one language to another and from one word category to another. For nouns, relevant information often includes the word's gender or other word class affiliation. Verbs will often belong to different verb classes whose identity you must know in order to conjugate the word correctly. For verbs whose conjugations are irregular, the dictionary should provide all or part of the conjugation. Any given language may have a number of unique grammatical issues that will require a dictionary to specify certain features for each dictionary entry. One thing no dictionary will do is teach you the grammar you will need in order to intelligently use this information. Knowing grammar is your key to making the best use of a dictionary.

The only serious advantages of the pocket-sized dictionaries are their cheapness and small size. The most comprehensive dictionaries are so big that you would never take them out of the house unless you were moving. They can also cost almost as much as a house. Unless you are a linguist, philologist, or a professional translator, there is little reason to make such an investment. Good dictionaries, even single volume ones, are often only as big and as costly as a college chemistry book. This is not to say they are cheap or light, but they are not beyond the budget of a student or the ability of a student to lug them to class a few times a week. If you are serious about learning a language, do not shy away from the price or weight of a decent dictionary just because pocket-sized ones happen to exist.

### **2.2.2 How to use a dictionary**

You may be thinking: "doesn't a pocket-size dictionary have the advantage that you can take it everywhere?" This is actually not such an advantage as you may think. Do you really need to take a dictionary everywhere? If you are in a foreign country and trying to speak the local language, you certainly do not want to be taking a dictionary with you everywhere. If you encounter unfamiliar words, then for heaven's sake, ask the person you are talking to what they mean. You'll remember the answer much better having heard it from someone in an actual conversation than you will looking it up in a dictionary. If the situation is too awkward for you to ask the person what they mean in the middle of the conversation, it is also too awkward to be getting out dictionaries. In such an event, or if you encountered the word in a written form, then remember the word and look it up later. At most, carry a pen and notebook for writing down unfamiliar words.

You do not want to be carrying a dictionary around anyway. At best it is socially awkward. Worse, you will not remember the words as well as if you learned them in context and you run the risk of turning your dictionary into a security blanket. There are only so many words you can learn in a day. It takes many, many days to become proficient in a foreign language. Until then, there will always be moments when you do not understand some word. There is no alternative to learning as much as you can each day using a dictionary as a reference, but carrying a dictionary around with you will not help you cut any corners.

Some foreign language dictionaries have their foreign-English and English-foreign sections in different volumes. If you are short on cash or short on room in your bookbag and only want to buy or carry one volume, the foreign-English is the more important volume by far. This is the volume that will unlock the target language for you and tell you how its words are used. This is the volume you will spend the best hours of your life leafing through to look up all of those unfamiliar words you underlined in foreign texts. It is the volume you will use to make your vocabulary lists. You will use this volume to look up verbs and other words you already know just to make sure you are conjugating them in the correct verb class etc. and that they are not exceptions to the standard grammatical rules. This volume will be one of your best friends. It is a true reference book.

Even if you have both volumes, the English-foreign section will be far less useful. It is really only used for writing in the target language. Never use dictionary words when you are speaking, restrict yourself to words you have heard. Even in writing, you should be trying to use words you know and avoiding words you don't know. You learn words best by using them after you have heard them. That way, you have a context to relate the word to. If you know a word only from the dictionary, you may not understand its usage and you may put it in the wrong context. If you are going to write a word you have just seen in the dictionary for the first time, try to limit yourself to words that will be used prominently in your essay. If you need to look up how to say something in every single sentence, you are probably attempting a project that is too ambitious for your current level. Scale it down. You will not remember most of these words and you may be using them incorrectly anyway. Try to write something you can understand, not something that is supposed to be an equivalent of what you would have written in English. If you can't understand what you have written, chances are that native speakers won't understand it either. As with everything else concerning language, you cannot cut corners, and perception precedes production. You cannot write advanced essays until you get a lot of practice writing simple ones and you cannot write at all unless you read a lot.

### **2.2.3 Reading and writing without vowels**

Persian is usually described as having six vowels. Three of them: a (as in "father"), i (as in "bee"), and u (as in "boo") are described as long. The other three: ā (as in "cat"), e (as in "bed"), and o are described as short. Each of the three long vowels is written as a letter. This is confusing enough, since the three letters representing these vowels (ā ē ō) also double as the consonants ʔ (glottal stop), y and w.

However, what is truly confusing is that none of the three short vowels a, e, o are ever written. They are never represented as letters, and they are hardly ever written as additional markings either. A system for marking such vowels as lines above and below the letters exists in the Arabic writing system, although it is seldom used, even in Arabic. It is virtually never used in Persian. This is especially difficult for students of Persian since, being an Indo-European language, its vowels are in no way predictable as they often are in Semitic languages like Arabic and Hebrew.

Another distinction made in Persian speech that is never written is consonant length. For instance, the spelling may signify either madeh “female” or maddah “matter, substance.” Both the quality of the short vowel and the length of the d are unpredictable from the writing system. There are actually very few pairs of words that differ only in consonant length. However, pronouncing consonants with incorrect length does constitute a noticeable accent.

The only spelling advantage of being an Indo-European language is that Persian words tend to be longer than Arabic ones. They are also less restricted in the sequences of consonants and vowels they can contain. This means that there is less of a chance that Persian words will look or sound alike. There are some confusing examples though, especially with short words, as can be seen in the following table:

<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Spelling</b>
sar	“head”	??
sor	“alcoholic rice drink”	??
ser	“benumbed, deadened”	??
serr	“secret”	??

The important thing is that you learn the proper pronunciation of each word correctly when you learn it. All Persian-English dictionaries will use some system (often Latin letters) to fully specify how Persian words are pronounced. Once you learn the correct pronunciation, you should be able to pronounce it correctly from memory when seeing it in writing. In the case of words that are written the same but pronounced differently, you will need to decide from the context which one you have just encountered.

## **2.3 Classroom Stuff**

### **2.3.1 Is learning a language just like other classroom learning?**

Language learning is quite different from most classroom experiences. Language learning tends to diverge from other disciplines both in the way a typical classroom operates and in the behaviors students should adopt to attain their goals. Unlike a traditional classroom setting where professors lecture and students listen or take notes, a language-learning environment should be dynamic and student-centered. The teacher should help foster this kind of environment, but the student is also responsible to participate actively and contribute positively to the classroom dynamic. The degree of success achieved in a

language class will depend very much on the active participation and involvement of each individual student in the class. Frequent absence and lack of preparation will negatively impact the overall progress of the class.

Language learning involves some apparently contradictory tendencies. For example, there is a great deal that is purely formulaic: vocabulary lists, verb conjugations, noun declensions, and grammar rules. But there is also that which is creative and unique: poetry, jokes, and culture-specific references and nuances. Ambiguities, idioms, and exceptions to the rule are as much a part of languages as are charts for verb conjugation. Competence in a language also subsumes cultural know-how and sensitivity, as well as the ability to take risks and feel comfortable with a new language “persona.”

Few other learning experiences provide such a combination of logic, rigor, and an outlet for creativity. In short, learning a foreign language can be one of life’s most challenging, stimulating, and satisfying experiences.

If you can, try to take as intensive a course as possible. The closer you can get to immersion learning, the better. A course that is four hours a week or less will most probably not allow you to reach proficiency no matter how many semesters you take. A course whose credit hours are twice the usual load can bring you to a tolerable level of proficiency in even two semesters.

While few universities offer intensive courses in Persian on a regular basis, The Eastern Consortium in Persian and Turkish offers intensive summer courses at the introductory and intermediate levels. The Eastern Consortium in Persian and Turkish is a cooperative arrangement of the Title VI National Resource Centers of Columbia, Georgetown, Harvard, New York, Ohio State, and Princeton Universities and the Universities of Michigan and Pennsylvania. The summer program is held at a different location each year. Fellowships and on-campus housing are available.

### **2.3.2 What strategies do good language learners employ?**

Some otherwise excellent students inevitably find that they aren’t on top when it comes to learning a foreign language. Just as some will claim that they aren’t “cut out” for learning math, a few students believe that learning a foreign language is beyond their capacities. Such assumptions are counterproductive. Certainly, varying levels of talent, inclination, and discipline affect the rate of progress in language learning, as in any field, but there are both general attitudes and specific steps that students can take to improve their ability to learn a foreign language. Here are some typical strategies and characteristics of good language learners.

- Be an active learner in the classroom and maximize your exposure to the language in general. Even if your teacher does not have a “target language only” policy in class, it is still a good idea to use the language as much as possible. Ask questions, chat with your classmates, and participate whenever possible in Persian. You may not feel like you know much, but by using what you do know,

you will add to that knowledge much more quickly. Try to encounter Persian whenever possible. Put up vocabulary cards around your house or apartment. Listen to a Persian news update once a day on the Internet. When you study vocabulary words, listen to them on tape (preferably in context) and repeat them out loud, then use them in sentences and write them down. Make it a goal to get to know Persian speakers and try speaking the language with them as much as possible.

- Be persistent. Persistence pays: Take each assigned text or exercise as a challenge, a puzzle to solve. Language learning involves hard work, but that doesn't mean one has to perceive it as a burden. Viewing some aspects of language learning with a playful attitude can also be beneficial. For example, use rhymes or songs to learn new words or expressions. Play games to conjugate verbs or to memorize vocabulary lists.
- Have a positive work ethic. Even the most naturally gifted language learners don't achieve advanced levels of proficiency without hard work and significant amounts of "time on task." You will be surprised how much improvement you can make when you concentrate and patiently keep trying. Expect to put in the time, and try to make it effective time. Willingness to work hard is important, but so too is the willingness to analyze your efforts to determine where they are well spent.
- In the classroom, be a team player and learn by doing and "teaching" as well as by listening. Many language teachers assign small group work both in and out of the classroom, not only to add variety to the class but also to give students the chance to learn by doing. Studies have shown that even speaking practice with students at beginning levels of proficiency can have great benefit. You don't have to be speaking Persian with a native speaker to learn something. Also, you'll need to recognize that students have different learning styles. For example, some students can't wait to jump in, while others prefer to watch from the bank or wade in the shallows until they feel comfortable before they try "swimming" in the language. If you are too loud and outspoken, you may have a negative impact on the ability of others to learn. Develop a balance between patience with the teacher, your classmates, and yourself, and an anxious desire to master material and move forward. Be considerate of others, but whatever you do stay mentally engaged, focus, and push yourself.
- Language is a skill to be acquired, not just information to be accumulated. While the importance of memorizing vocabulary and verb tables cannot be stressed enough, by itself it will never constitute knowledge of a language. Students who can pass vocabulary and grammar quizzes but do not bother to write the essays or engage in discussion will find that even their memorization efforts will have been in vain.
- Good language learners are unafraid to make mistakes. They are willing to try, and correction from a teacher or others is appreciated instead of resented. An

enthusiastic attitude in a language class can have a tremendous impact on your own progress as well as on that of others.

- Good language learners learn from their mistakes and those of their classmates. While they are not afraid of making mistakes, they focus on how to avoid repeating previous mistakes. They learn from the mistakes other students make in class and correct them silently while listening.
- Good language learners are comfortable with a little ambiguity. They are comfortable with not understanding everything they hear or read in the language for the first time. They focus on getting the overall meaning rather than getting “hung-up” on one word or another.

In conclusion, good language learners come from all kinds of backgrounds and with a whole variety of styles, preferences, and abilities. Not all good language learners are the most naturally gifted. They are simply better at adopting effective attitudes and strategies, and they keep at it. None of us can afford to rely on talent alone. Hard work, an enthusiastic attitude, and time-tested strategies are the best formula for success in language acquisition.

### **2.3.3 My teacher’s style doesn’t match mine. What should I do?**

No one teacher’s style will be ideal for every student in the class. Expect your teacher to have strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps your teacher is a native speaker of Persian but has a hard time answering questions about grammar. Other teachers may have a talent for explaining difficult concepts but will never have native conversation abilities. Students should not let teachers’ weaknesses limit how much they will learn. Instead of giving in to a tendency to blame the teacher for an apparent lack of progress, students can, to a very large degree, determine the course and rate of their progress. Even a good teacher is only a guide and resource. Ultimately students should take responsibility for what they learn.

If you do struggle with a teacher’s style or methodology, before you give in to frustration you should find appropriate ways to express your concerns to your teacher. You may be surprised at the results. Good teachers want to improve how they teach and are eager for student feedback. In those rare cases where a teacher truly is hindering students from reaching their goals and is unwilling to accommodate requests for change, those students should consider changing classes and making their experience known to a program administrator.

### **2.3.4 Why are other students progressing more quickly than I am?**

Simply put, learning any language will have moments of difficulty and discomfort. Persian is no exception. Few people are so well adjusted that they feel no discomfort when they don’t understand a question addressed to them or when they make mistakes in front of others. But don’t let the quick progress, or the apparent quick progress, of others

deter your own. A very common perception among students in language learning classrooms is that, while “I” am struggling, everyone else is doing well. Occasionally that perception may be true, but in the great majority of cases, you are simply experiencing the natural fears and insecurities of language learning.

It can be especially challenging to have “heritage” students in class who come with various degrees of exposure to Persian but appear to know everything. These students, in fact, may know enough to intimidate their peers but may not perform well otherwise. Even those who have good listening comprehension and speaking skills may have other serious gaps to fill. The point is that, whatever your background, learning Persian takes a lot of hard work and occasional frustrations. A good teacher will find challenges for all students.

We might have posed a different question: what should I do if I feel that other students are holding me back? If you are a strong language learner who catches on quickly, don’t detract from the rest of the class. Your assistance to other students and patience with the speed of the class will be greatly appreciated by the teacher, and will actually increase your language abilities. Help contribute to an encouraging environment where all students are unafraid to try or make mistakes. There are learning strategies you can adopt to improve your performance.

### **2.3.5 Should I focus on reading comprehension skills, or on listening and speaking?**

The best-case scenario is to have a balanced approach that allows you to gain familiarity and expertise in all areas of language comprehension and production. Practical constraints may limit what can reasonably be done, so the decision of what to focus on must be made by each individual student. If you need to be able to converse in Persian, speaking and listening must have a high priority. Likewise, someone who hopes to read literature and scholarly books or translate newspaper articles should focus on reading comprehension (though, in the second case, translation is often considered a skill of its own). No approach should focus on one aspect of language learning to the exclusion of all else. In fact, competence and experience in one facet of language undoubtedly improves ability in other areas.

### **2.3.6 Vocabulary tips**

Whether you are learning in a classroom or by yourself, you will need to build up a decent vocabulary in your target language. While vocabulary is no fun, it is the weak link in the language learning chain and therefore you can’t afford to neglect it. No matter how smooth your accent, no matter how deep your understanding of the grammar, you will not be able to converse or read farther than your vocabulary allows. While many students neglect vocabulary, others make the opposite mistake of trying to learn too much at a time. This leads to frustration and often accomplishes less than a more modest approach.

Pace yourself. Settle on a more or less fixed quantity of words per time period and commit yourself to it. If you are bombarded with new words one week, don’t try to learn

more than you have committed yourself to. Save the rest for another week. The important thing is to live up to your set goal each week and not miss any weeks. Keep your weeks (or other time periods) separate. If you are using flashcards, keep them in separate piles. Do not use a shoebox that contains all of the words you are supposed to know. This will overwhelm you. Focus on knowing the words you are supposed to know this week. If you are ahead this week, check up on vocabulary from the last few weeks, but never rush into new vocabulary before the time comes. A vocabulary of only a few thousand words is already enough for proficiency in most tasks. 10 new words a week is over 500 words a year. 20 words a week is over 1000 a year. Find your pace and stick to it, whether classes are in session or not.

It is surprisingly unimportant which words you choose to learn. At the elementary level, your teacher or textbook will probably select words for you grouped by theme: getting acquainted, asking for directions, telling time, ordering food, etc. This is fine. At a more advanced level, your vocabulary will come from stories, movies, or even conversations and real-life situations. The most important thing is to have each word come from some kind of context. The context is more of a factor in memorizing a word than the word itself.

There are few shortcuts to vocabulary. If the target language is very similar to your native one (as Spanish and French are similar to English), the words will sometimes be similar and this helps. If the target language is different enough (like Persian), this is not a good strategy.

A better long-term strategy is familiarity with the writing system and grammar of the target language. At first, vocabulary words will look to you like random sequences of scratchy letters and they will be very hard to remember. As you become more familiar with the writing system, you will be able to memorize what the words look like iconically. The more words you know, the greater the chance the new word you are trying to memorize will be derived from a familiar root or contain a familiar affix or template. The more roots and affixes you know, the smaller the chance that you will have to memorize a new word completely from scratch.

A good teacher will select your vocabulary from texts you are reading in class and then make you use them in homework and classroom exercises. If your teacher does not always do this, or if you are studying on your own, try to use your new vocabulary words in a real-world context whenever you have the chance.

### **2.3.7 How much should I study each day?**

Language learning is by its nature time-intensive. Even if you have the good fortune to be in an immersion environment, you will still need to do regular studying on your own to benefit from that environment. One or two hours a day outside the classroom is not an unreasonable amount of time. Naturally, there is a limit to how much one can profitably accomplish in one sitting or in one day. More important than the quantity of time you spend on Persian is the quality of the time.

Not uncommonly, determined students who find that the process does not come easily to them will throw themselves at the task in rather unproductive ways. Some students will work on Persian for hours on end, with little gain. This can be frustrating and humiliating, particularly when learning the language appears to come so easily to others. Learn to recognize the difference between “healthy” and unhealthy levels of frustration. Your mind gets tired just like your body, so don’t attempt marathon study sessions. Expect Persian to challenge you, and rise to the challenge by working with focus and determination, but don’t expect to get to the top of the mountain in one day (week, year, etc.). Enjoy the privilege and challenge of Persian study.

As should go without saying: it is particularly ineffective to try to “cram” to learn a language. If success on a final exam is your only goal, then that, sadly, will likely be your only benefit from the class. Regular, consistent study is the best and probably only way to learn a language well. Not only will you perform well in class and really learn something about the language, you will also develop sound study habits that will carry over into other areas.

### **2.3.8 Should I get a native speaker as a tutor?**

As the saying goes, having teeth doesn’t make you a dentist. As is generally true of native speakers of English, most native speakers of Persian aren’t great at explaining their language. Good tutors are few and far between. Shop around, and try different tutors out if you can. Find someone who strikes you as a flexible personality who will be easy to work with. It helps if you like them, and if they can be something of a role model for functioning in Persian. Find someone whose pronunciation strikes you as clear. An educated person will generally be a better bet, but only to a point. Find someone who will create opportunities for you to speak and stay away from someone who does most of the speaking. You want someone down to earth who will work with you and create opportunities for you to use the language.

Most importantly, find someone who’ll cut to the quick and give you just what you need. A good tutor will be able to quickly assess your personal level of Persian, listen to and understand your goals, and help you get to where you want to be, rather than simply applying a preconceived notion of how Persian should be taught that supposedly fits “one and all.”

### **2.3.9 Travel to Iran**

Everyone who has visited Iran speaks of its natural beauty, archeological and cultural treasures, artistic and culinary delights, and above all, the warmth of its people. And of course, like students of any language, students of Persian who aim at achieving a high level of proficiency will be seriously held back if they never spend time in an environment where their target language is widely used.

This being said, there are few programs for foreigners to study in Iran. Ask your teacher

for details. Be forewarned however, that at the time of this writing the attitude of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards foreign visitors remains somewhat erratic. Several current laws have also been a source of trouble for some visitors. Foreigners with Jewish names, and anyone whose passport indicates that they have traveled to Israel, will have trouble getting a visa. Iran allows freedom of religion to Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, but the Baha'i faith is outlawed as such and its practice constitutes a crime. The wife of an Iranian citizen cannot leave the country without her husband's permission, even if she herself is not an Iranian citizen. Missionary work and Apostasy (conversion from Islam to another religion) are punishable by death. Sexual relations between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are also punishable by death. Dress codes are usually strictly enforced in public, but enforcement of many other laws are highly variable and depend on which way the political wind is blowing.

Another problematic issue is the tendency of the Islamic Republic to view foreign visitors as pawns to be used to "punish" foreign governments when diplomatic tensions arise. Some incidents have involved arbitrary detainments and bizarre criminal charges. Ironically, it is foreign visitors who hold Iranian citizenship who are particularly vulnerable. The Islamic Republic does not recognize dual citizenship and views anyone who has Iranian citizenship as subject to Iranian law and no other, even if they left the country before the revolution.

## Section III: Similarities between Persian and Arabic

### The Arabic Connection

Speakers of English should find learning Persian to be easier than learning Arabic. Persian has no grammatical gender, for instance. It has no case endings or noun-adjective agreement. Its morphology is concatenative (prefixes and suffixes are stacked on to roots in a linear fashion) like English, with none of the dreaded “root and pattern” syndrome of Arabic, except in loanwords. Persian makes no distinction like the “verb forms” of Arabic or the “binyanim” of Hebrew. What complications Persian does present are very similar to those found in English and mainly concern the verb system: verbs have a 2x3 number by person conjugation, have separate past and non-past stems, and have a large number of composite tenses that are formed by stacking participles and auxiliary verbs.

However, similarities between Arabic and Persian are great enough that no study of Persian will be complete without covering some aspects of Arabic as well. Speakers of Persian are often unaware of just what elements of their language are Arabic in origin. Students of Persian, however, may benefit by recognizing the Arabic element of Persian as something distinct, since it is governed by slightly different rules.

It follows that anyone who already knows Arabic is at an advantage when studying Persian. However, such students should beware of so-called “false friends.” There are many words and grammatical elements of Arabic origin that have taken on a different usage in Persian. Assuming that they are “the same” as in Arabic in every way can lead to unnecessary mistakes.

Since it is quite common in the United States for students to arrive at Persian after having at least some exposure to Arabic, some of the potential short cuts, as well as false friends, will be mentioned.

### 3.1 The alphabet

The Persian alphabet contains all 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet plus an additional four:

<u>letter</u>	<u>sound</u>
پ	<i>p</i>
چ	<i>ch</i>
ژ	<i>zh</i> (as in “garage”)
گ	<i>g</i>

Each of these letters is ordered in the dictionary immediately after the Arabic letter it is modified from.

There are eight Arabic letters that are used only in the spelling of Arabic loanwords. These are the six so-called guttural consonants ع, ط, ظ, ض, ص, and ح and the two interdental fricatives: ذ and ت. None of these letters are pronounced the way they are in Arabic. This actually makes pronunciation of Persian much easier than pronunciation of Arabic. Each of these sounds is pronounced the same as an already existing Persian

sound in the following way:

ط	is <i>t</i> exactly like	ت	
ع	is ‘(glottal stop) exactly like	ا	
ح	is <i>h</i> exactly like	ه	
ص	and ت	are both <i>s</i> exactly like	س
ض	ظ and ذ	are all <i>z</i> exactly like	ز

No matter how long it took you to learn to pronounce all of these letters correctly in Arabic, you will have to retrain yourself to pronounce them “incorrectly” in Persian. This shouldn’t take as long. Persian speakers tend to have little appreciation for the differences these letters are supposed to make in Arabic, and often wonder why there are four letters that are all “z.”

The Arabic consonant و (w) is pronounced “v” in Persian.

Finally, the letters غ and ق both represent the same sound in Persian, which is closer to the sound made by ر in Arabic, like a throaty French or German “r.” Neither letter is restricted in Persian to Arabic loanwords, but there is no reason to worry about pronouncing them differently. Thus, the Arabic loanwords بايزی “near” and بايزغ “strange” are both pronounced gharib in Persian.

### 3.2 The vowels

A very symmetrical relationship exists between the six vowels of Persian and the three vowels of classical Arabic. Arabic a (fatha) is Persian a when short and Persian ā when long. Arabic i (kasra) is Persian e when short and Persian ī when long. Arabic u (dammah) is Persian o when short and Persian ū when long. Thus, Arabic murshid “guide” is Persian morshed, because both vowels are short in Arabic. However, Arabic mudir “director” is Persian modir because the i is long in Arabic. There are hardly any exceptions to this pattern. As long as you remember what vowels are short in Arabic, you can predict the pronunciation in Persian very well. Arabic geminate consonants (shaddah) are also preserved in loanwords into Persian, which are thus likewise predictable if you know your Arabic. Be forewarned, however, that native Persian words may also have geminate consonants.

Also, very important: all Persian words are stressed on the last syllable, no matter how they are stressed in Arabic. No exceptions.

### 3.3 The Arabic root and pattern system

Students of Semitic languages like Arabic will be aware of the fact that related words are often derived by means of the root and pattern system. The root word s-l-m is a commonly used example. From the basic verb salima, to be safe, Arabic derives other verbs such as sallama, to hand over or deliver; aslama, to submit; and istaslama, to

surrender. The nouns *salam*, peace; *salama*, health or safety; and *muslim*, a Muslim, derive from the same root.

Being an Indo-European language, Persian does not derive words in this manner, but by means of affixation, which is far more intuitive to English speakers. Thus, from the Persian root *saz* “healthy,” we have *sazgar* “wholesome,” *sazesh* “collusion,” *nasaz*, “discordant,” *nasazgari* “unwholesomeness,” etc.

Arabic words that have been derived in Arabic by means of the root and pattern system are borrowed into Persian one at a time and undergo the predictable sound changes that all Arabic sounds undergo when borrowed into Persian. Persian speakers probably simply learn these words individually with poor understanding of how they are derived in Arabic. However, if you understand the Arabic root and pattern system, you can use it as a shortcut to figuring out how these words should be pronounced in Persian. The root and pattern system guarantees that all words generated according to a single pattern all have the same vowels. This uniformity will remain even after the word is borrowed into Persian, since all the vowels will change in the same way. Thus, all words of Arabic origin that have the pattern **لَعَفَت** are guaranteed to be pronounced *tafa’ol* in Persian. If you encounter a word in print and recognize it as a member of an Arabic pattern, you do not have to look it up to know how it is pronounced in Persian. This will work even for Arabic words you’ve never seen before, as long as you recognize what pattern they are derived from, and remember the rules of Arabic-to-Persian sound correspondence.

The Arabic root and pattern system is also used to derive plural forms of nouns in ways that seem strange and unpredictable to non-Arabic speakers. For instance, the plural of *kitab* “book” is *kutub* “books.” Many Arabic words have been borrowed into Persian together with their plural forms. Persian dictionaries will list these words and their Arabic plurals separately. In other words, you do not have to figure out what the “root” of the word is in order to look it up. Persian speakers often do not use the Arabic plural forms and create new ones by adding one of the Persians plural suffixes **ان** *-ān* or **اء** *-hā* to the Arabic singular form. Thus, Arabic **وضع** “member” is borrowed into Persian as *ozv* and its plural **اضع** “members” is borrowed as *a’za’*. However, in the course of time Persian speakers have created their own plural **اوضاع** *ozvha*. Both plural forms are in use in Persian, sometimes even within in the same text. Both forms are acceptable in speech and in writing. The name of the infamous Taliban of Afghanistan is similarly derived. It is in fact the Arabic word *talib* “student” suffixed with the Persian plural suffix *-an*. The actual Arabic plural of *talib* is *tullab*.

### 3.4 *Idafa* vs. *Ezafe*

The Arabic grammatical construct known as *idafa* has a counterpart in Persian known as *ezafe*. The name “*ezafe*” is of course simply the Persian pronunciation of the Arabic word, *idafa* (the guttural *d* becomes *z*, the short *a* becomes *e*, etc.). However, despite the name and other similarities, Arabic *idafa* and Persian *ezafe* are really two different grammatical constructs. Students of Arabic who are learning Persian should not assume that they automatically understand *ezafe*. While some uses of the two constructs overlap,

Persian ezafe is far more powerful and broadly used. For instance, any Persian adjective and the noun it modifies stand in an ezafe relationship. This is never the case with Arabic idafa.

Some instances of Arabic idafa have been borrowed into Persian as entire phrases. For instance, Arabic **عوقول ابيرق** “impending, imminent” has been borrowed into Persian as gharib-elvoghu’. The internal idafa structure of phrases like this is grammatically opaque in Persian. The Persian word, “ayatollah” is similarly from the Arabic idafa **آيات آيا** “signs of God.” Its structure is also opaque in Persian.

### 3.5 Cognates

The large number of Arabic loanwords in Persian is of course welcome news to those with prior knowledge of Arabic. This can indeed help you; so don’t let it trip you up instead. You will often see “Arabic” words appear in Persian texts spelled exactly as they would be in Arabic. Make sure you do not pronounce them as they are pronounced in Arabic! Failure to modify the vowels correctly and shift stress to the last syllable may result in the word as you pronounce it not even being recognized by Persian speakers. Failure to degutturalize the guttural consonants may result in Persian speakers thinking something is wrong with your throat and offering you a glass of water.

A final word of warning concerns words whose Persian meaning has shifted somewhat from their Arabic meaning. For instance, Arabic musamaha means “forgiveness” while its Persian cognate mosamaha means “negligence.” Many differences are subtler. No matter how well you know Arabic, check to make sure what the usage of an Arabic loanword is in Persian before you start using it yourself.

## Section IV: Resources for Students of Persian

### 4.1 Books

Many of the titles listed here were first compiled in a list of recommended books in the Iran Times.

#### 4.1.1 Persian language and textbooks

- Beeman, William. 1986. *Language, Status, and Power in Iran*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.
- Hanaway, William and Brian Spooner (eds.). 1995. *Reading Nasta'liq: Persian and Urdu Hands from 1500 to the Present*. Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers.
- Lambton, Ann. 1967. *Persian Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mahootian, Shahrzad. 1997. *Persian*. London: Routledge.
- Samareh, Yadollah. 1990. *Amuzesh-e Zabane Farsi (AZFA)*. Tehran: Institute for Islamic Culture and Communications.
- Windfur, Gernot. 1979. *Modern Persian, Elementary Level*. Ann Arbor: Dept. of Near Eastern Studies, University of Michigan.
- Windfur, Gernot and Shapur Bostanbakhsh. 1980. *Modern Persian, Intermediate Level*. Ann Arbor: Dept. of Near Eastern Studies, University of Michigan.

#### 4.1.2 History of Iran (excluding the revolution)

- Afary, Janet. 1996. *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Amanat, Abbas. 1997. *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foran, John. 1993. *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
- Irving, Clive. 1979. *Crossroads of Civilization: 3000 Years of Persian History*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

#### 4.1.3 The Revolution, its run-up and aftermath

- Abrahamian, Ervand. 1982. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Abrahamian, Ervand. 1989. *The Iranian Mojahedin*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Afkhami, Gholam. 1985. *The Iranian Revolution: Thanatos on a National Scale*. Washington, DC: Middle East Institute.
- Akhavi, Shahrough. 1980. *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Bakhash, Shaul. 1984. *Reign of the Ayatollahs*. New York: Basic Books.
- Menashri, David. 2001. *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran*. London: Frank Cass.

Moin, Baqer. 1999. *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*. London: I.B. Tauris.  
Schirazi, Asghar. 1997. *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*. London: I.B. Tauris.  
Taheri, Amir. 1985. *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution*. Bethesda, Md.: Adler & Adler.

#### **4.1.4 Religious identity in Iran**

Abrahamian, Ervand. 1993. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
Chehabi, H. E. 1990. *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: the Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.  
Mackey, Sandra. 1996. *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation*. New York: Dutton.  
Rahnema, Ali. 1998. *An Islamic Utopian: a Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati*. London: I.B. Tauris.

#### **4.1.5 Iranian nationalism**

Bill, James and W. Roger Louis (eds.). 1988. *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil*. Austin: University of Texas Press.  
Cottam, Richard. 1979. *Nationalism in Iran: Updated through 1978*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press

#### **4.1.6 Minorities in Iran**

Amighi Kestenberg, Janet. 1990. *The Zoroastrians of Iran: Conversion, Assimilation, or Persistence*. New York: AMS Press.  
Atabaki, Touraj. 2000. *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris.  
Beck, Lois. 1986. *The Qashqa'i of Iran*. New Haven: Yale University Press.  
Garthwaite, Gene. 1983. *Khans and Shahs: a Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiari in Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Koochi-Kamali, Farideh. 2003. *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.  
Loeb, Lawrence. 1977. *Outcaste: Jewish Life in Southern Iran*. New York: Gordon and Breach.  
Tapper, Richard. 1997. *Frontier Nomads of Iran: a Political and Social History of the Shahsevan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Waterfield, Robin. 1973. *Christians in Persia: Assyrians, Armenians, Roman Catholics and Protestants*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

#### 4.1.7 Women in Iran

- Azadi, Sousan. 1987. *Out of Iran: One Woman's Escape from the Ayatollahs*. London: Macdonald.
- Erika, Friedl. 1989. *Women of Deh Koh: Lives in an Iranian Village*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Farman-Farmaian, Sattareh. 1992. *Daughter of Persia: a Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem through the Islamic Revolution*. New York: Crown.
- Haeri, Shahla. 1989. *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'i Iran*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press
- Milani, Farzaneh. 1992. *Veils and Words: the Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press.
- Mosteshar, Cherry. 1996. *Unveiled: One Woman's Nightmare in Iran*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Nafisi, Azar. 2003. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: a Memoir in Books*. New York: Random House.
- Paidar, Parvin. 1995. *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taj al-Saltana. 1993. *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity, 1884-1914*. Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers.

#### 4.1.8 Persian literature in translation

- Ferdowsi. 1967. *The Epic of the Kings: Shah-nama, the National Epic of Persia*. London: Routledge and K. Paul.
- Golshiri, Houshang. 2003. *Black Parrot, Green Crow: a Collection of Short Fiction*. Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers.
- Hedayat, Sadegh. 1957. *The Blind Owl*. London: J. Calder.
- Jalal al-Din Rumi. 1961. *Tales from the Masnavi*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Omar Khayam. 1972. *Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayam; a New Translation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Naderpour, Nader. 1986. *False Dawn: Persian Poems (1951-1984)*. Austin, Texas: Dept. of Oriental and African Languages and Literatures, University of Texas at Austin.

#### 4.1.9 Iran through western eyes

- Limbert, John. 1987. *Iran, at War with History*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
- O'Donnell, Terence. 1980. *Garden of the Brave in War*. New Haven: Ticknor & Fields.
- Shirley, Edward. 1997. *Know Thine Enemy*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Shuster, W. Morgan. 1912. *The Strangling of Persia; a Story of the European Diplomacy and Oriental Intrigue that Resulted in the Denationalization of Twelve Million Mohammedans, a Personal Narrative*. New York: The Century Co.

## **4.2 Newspapers**

Print media seems to be on its way out these days, but you if live in a major metropolitan area, you might look for some of the Iranian expatriate newspapers (usually weeklies) sold and often distributed free in local Iranian-owned stores and restaurants. Most of these are local and limited in their coverage but some, like the Washington D.C.-based Iran Times and the London-based Kayhan (not to be confused with a Tehran paper of the same name) provide serious coverage of the entire Persian-speaking world. Iran Times also provides several pages in English in every issue. Like many expatriate papers, it has no online presence, but subscriptions can be ordered at a reasonable price by calling 1-800-766-9085. Pick up the phone! Dial! You'll be glad you did it. And it's completely painless.

A number of papers published in Iran now have websites. Some are listed in the "web-based resources" section below.

## **4.3 Music**

Persian music is very old and very diverse. It has traditional, ical, poetry recitation, pop and dance music and a gallery of household-name singers and composers going back generations. Since the revolution, much music that is not religious has been banned in Iran. As a result, much of the popular music industry has migrated abroad, especially to the Los Angeles area. This music is then smuggled back into Iran, where its main market is. Iranian-owned stores usually carry some Persian CDs. Of course, it is possible now to order almost anything on the Internet, if you trust on-line vendors with your credit card number. A number of vendors are listed in the "web-based resources" section below. Shop at your own risk.

## **4.4 Movies**

Iranian Cinema is actually one of the oldest in the Middle East. The market for Persian-language films has never been as large as that for Arabic-language films, but what Iran lacks in quantity, it more than makes up for in quality. The revolution saw a setback in film production for a few years, but production greatly picked up in the 1990s, with even some pre-revolutionary directors returning to make new movies. Western interest in Iranian cinema is at an all time high, and it has become easier than ever before to find many of the latest Iranian releases on the shelves at your local video rental store. Certain themes even seem to be developing in Iranian movies of late that almost appear tailored to Western audiences, in particular films about small children. The Islamic regime does not allow films to be made freely and uncensored, but Iranian filmmakers are constantly pushing the envelope, trying to see how much they can get away with. Almost every year sees a new movie that is just a little bit more daring than the year before, nothing too shocking by Western standards, though.

## 4.5 Web-based resources

### 4.5.1 Learning resources

[Kamran Talattof's Online Persian Language Learning Resource](#)  
[Links to many interesting cultural sites](#)

### 4.5.2 News/media

[Islamic Republic News Agency](#)  
[Portal for news concerning Iran and Iranians](#)  
[Kayhan \(London\)](#) - all articles available in PDF format.  
[Jam-e Jam \(Tehran\)](#) - a large Iranian daily newspaper  
[Radio Farda \(Los Angeles\)](#) - reduced-quality streaming audio.  
[Iran-Va-Jahan](#) - available in several languages.

### 4.5.3 Blogs

[Blogs by Iranians](#)  
[Iran Filter](#)

### 4.5.4 Culture and entertainment

<http://www.iranian.com/today.html> - Diverse opinion and things cultural  
<http://www.irandokht.com/> - A site "for and about Iranian women in the spirit of global solidarity, emphasizing identity and celebrating ethnicity"  
[Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran](#)  
<http://www.farsinet.com/> - Christian portal  
<http://www.persepolis.com/> - Screensavers, jokes, etc.  
<http://www.oldcarpet.com/> - California-based importer of carpets