

BRIDGING LANGUAGES, *Building Understanding*

A Practical Comparison of Persian and English
for Multilingual Teaching and Learning



CULTURAL
AWARENESS



CLEAR
COMMUNICATION



INCLUSIVE
CLASSROOMS



STRONGER
CONNECTIONS



سلام
Salam

Hello!

زبان
Zabân

All languages
are beautiful!

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PURPOSE:

A LINGUISTICALLY INFORMED OVERVIEW

- Describe **basic phonological, syntactic, and lexical contrasts**
- Identify **instructional adjustments** support clearer instruction and reduce learner frustration
- Explain **predictable transfer patterns** observed in Persian-speaking English learners

IMPORTANT NOTE



The patterns are tendencies, not universal traits.

Persian-speaking learners are diverse across:

- region
- generation
- educational background
- multilingual experience
- individual identity

⌣ LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION

- **Persian** is an **Indo-European** language, though they developed very differently over time.
- It is written using a modified Arabic script but is **not structurally related to Arabic** (a Semitic language).
- Major regional standardized varieties:
 - **Dari** (Afghanistan)
 - **Farsi** (Iran)
 - **Tajik Persian** (Tajikistan, written in Cyrillic)



ONE LANGUAGE.

Three homelands. Equal in every way.

فارسی

Farsi

Iran

Spoken by ~80 million
Tehrani variety =
standard
Rich literary tradition

دري

Dari

Afghanistan

Spoken by ~40 million
Kabuli variety =
standard
Oldest written Persian

تاجیکی

Tajik

Tajikistan

Spoken by ~8 million
Dushanbe variety =
standard
Written in Cyrillic
script



From the classroom — Arzo Elmjo, Dari speaker, Afghan, CRC

Persian crossed mountains and empires to get here.

It deserves to be welcomed.

Dari is not less than Farsi

It is Persian. Equal in grammar, in script, in beauty. Different in sound and home.

Afghan students already know the language

What they need is not more correction. It is recognition that what they know is right.

One word from you changes everything

Salâm (hi), Tashakur (thanks). That is all it takes to tell a student they belong.

SOUND SYSTEM ANALYSIS: LISTEN FOR PATTERNS

Before we analyze sounds, I want us to *experience* them.

- *these*
- *earth*
- *think*
- *school*
- *spring*
- *student*



PERSIAN SOUND SYSTEM VS. ENGLISH

English sound	Persian substitute	Example
/θ/ (think)	/t/	think → tink
/ð/ (this)	/d/	this → dis
/w/	/v/	BMW → BMV
s + consonant	adds e-	school → eschool

SUMMARY: SOUND SYSTEM DIFFERENCES

English	Common Persian Transfer Pattern
Words can start with 2–3 consonants (school, spring, student)	Initial vowel added → eschool, espring
“th” sounds: /θ/ (think), /ð/ (this)	/θ/ → /t/ or /s/ ; /ð/ → /d/
/v/ and /w/ are distinct sounds	/w/ often approximated as /v*

WORD ORDER DIFFERENCES

- **Persian** word order is **SOV** (Subject–Object–Verb)

Example:

man ketâb râ mikhanam : “I the book read”

- **English** uses **SVO**:

Example: I read the book



WORD ORDER: EXAMPLES

English Subject – Verb – Object	Persian Subject – Object – Verb	Literal English
1. The teacher read the book.	معلم کتاب را خواند Moallem ketâb râ khând	Teacher book read
2. I saw the student.	من دانشجو را دیدم Man dâneshtju râ didam	I student saw

DO ADJECTIVES COME BEFORE OR AFTER NOUNS IN PERSIAN?

- In Persian, the normal word order is:
- **NOUN + ezāfe (ـِ / -e / -ye) + ADJECTIVE**

Examples:

- (dâneshtu-ye khub) → good student : Student-**e** good! دانشجوی خوب
- (ketâb-e no) → new book کتابِ نو
- (moallem-e mehrabân) → kind teacher معلمِ مهربان
- The **ezāfe (ـِ / -e / -ye)** is the small connecting vowel linking nouns and adjectives.

VOCABULARY DIFFERENCES AND CHALLENGES

1. **Persian** frequently uses **light verb** constructions
(kardan+ another word)→ explain in the next slide
 2. **English** relies heavily on **phrasal verbs**
 3. **English prepositions** make **finer distinctions**
- These differences increase vocabulary learning load

EXAMPLES: VERBS OFTEN COMBINE WITH *KARDAN* : 'TO DO':

USED IN COMBINATION WITH ANOTHER WORD

Persian	Literal	English Equivalent
تمرین کردن tamrin kardan	doing practice	To practice
سؤال کردن so'āl kardan	doing question	To ask
سفر کردن safar kardan	doing travel	To travel

SCRIPT DIFFERENCES

- Persian uses a different alphabet (**32 letters**)
- Written **right to left**
- **Connected** script (like cursive)
- **Letters change shape depending on position:** beginning / middle / end
- Same letter, four shapes: Example : /b/ ب – ب – ب – ب
- Requires **visual retraining** for English readers

CORE LANGUAGE SYSTEM DIFFERENCES

ENGLISH

PERSIAN

Articles required (a, an, the)	No articles
Uses do/does/did	No equivalent
“Be” is required	Often dropped
He vs. She	One gender neutral pronoun: او(ou)
Left-to-right	Right-to-left
Capital letters	No capital letters
Adjective noun	Noun adjective

EMPATHY BUILDING: CHALLENGES AND EXERCISES

1. Word Order Challenge
2. Pronunciation Challenge
3. Memory Challenge
4. Proofreading Challenge

WORD ORDER CHALLENGE

- Below are two **correct English sentences**. Try to write the Persian sentence : (In Persian, the verb typically comes at the end)

1. Sara works at the university.

2. I am a good professor.

1. Sara at university works.

Finglish: Sara dar dāneshgāh kār mikonad.

2. I professor good am

Finglish: man ostād-e khub hastam.

WORD-ORDER CHALLENGE (GROUP ACTIVITY)



- Arrange and modify sentences the Persian way.

Example: *The student finished the homework.* **Persian:** *Student homework finished*

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. She bought a book. | 1. She book bought. |
| 2. They are studying English. | 2. They English studying are. |
| 3. He went to school yesterday. | 3. Yesterday went school. |
| 4. I didn't understand the questions. | 4. I question not understood. |

EMPATHY MOMENT: INVISIBLE COGNITIVE WORK



- Imagine rebuilding every sentence you speak from a new structure.
- **Language transfer** is not confusion, it is **cognitive restructuring**
- If I understand the logic behind the learner's language, I correct more effectively and with more empathy.

PRONUNCIATION CHALLENGE



Persian

Transliteration

English

من

(*man*)

I

و

(*va*)

and

سارا

(*Sârâ*)

Sara

استاد

(*ostâd*)

professor

خوب

(*khub*)

good

دانشگاه

(*dâneshgâh*)

university

کار کردن

(*kâr kardan*)

to work

OPTIONAL: MEMORY CHALLENGE



MATCH THE PERSIAN WORD WITH ITS TRANSLITERATION AND ENGLISH MEANING.

Persian

Transliteration

English

من

(*Sârâ*)

professor

و

(*dâneshgâh*)

and

سارا

(*khub*)

to work

استاد

(*man*)

Sara

خوب

(*va*)

university

دانشگاه

(*ostâd*)

good

کار کردن

(*kâr kardan*)

I

PROOFREADING CHALLENGE



- سارا در دانشگاه کار می‌کند.
 - سارا در دانشگاه کار می‌کند.
-
- مم سارا هستم.
 - من سارا هستم.

PERSIAN VS. ENGLISH ACADEMIC STYLE: RHETORIC & MOVE STRUCTURE



- English academic writing prefers **short sentences and linear structure** (e.g., the five-paragraph essay).
- Some Persian academic traditions may place greater emphasis on contextual buildup and elaboration than contemporary English academic writing.
- English argumentation is **linear**; Persian is often **context-first** and more **formal**.

CONTRASTIVE MOVE ANALYSIS: PERSIAN VS. ENGLISH **ACADEMIC WRITING**



Research **Abstracts**

- English abstracts often follow Hyland (2000) model and have a clear sequence:
Introduction → Purpose → Method → Results → Conclusion
- Persian abstracts may emphasize **purpose and results**, and conclusions are sometimes less explicit.

Research **Introductions**

- English introductions often follow Swales' (1990) model:
Establish territory → Establish a niche → Occupy the niche
- Persian introductions may **compress or combine these moves**, resulting in a less linear structure.

- Adopt in part from Zandvakili & Kashani (2012); Hyland (2000); Swales (1990)

DO PERSIAN WRITERS USE PARAGRAPHS AND INDENTING?

- Both languages use paragraphs to organize ideas, and the formal conventions for marking them are remarkably similar.
- New paragraphs are traditionally marked by an indented first line, typically on the right side for Persian and the left for English.
- Persian paragraphs may sometimes be longer and more elaborative, often favoring a more context-rich and cohesive style, whereas modern English academic writing often emphasizes concise, single-focus paragraphs.
- Topic sentences in Persian may appear at the beginning, similar to English, though Persian writers may also provide additional contextual buildup before reaching the main point.



EMAIL COMMUNICATION: SMALL DIFFERENCES, BIG MEANING

- In Persian email culture, **opening lines** like “I hope you are doing well” are often **relational, not just formulaic**.
- If a student includes a personal or relational opening, a brief response helps build **rapport and respect**.
- **Helpful response examples:** *I hope you are doing well too, or Thank you, I hope you are well as well.*
- **Punctuation** can also feel different across cultures.
- In formal Persian communication, frequent **exclamation marks** may sometimes be interpreted differently depending on context and generation.
- **Example:** “You did great on this homework.” may feel warmer than “*You did great!*”

PERSIAN VS. ENGLISH INTONATION

Feature	Persian	English
Sentence intonation	May sound less final to English listeners in some contexts	Statements often end with a clearer falling contour
Rising tone	Can signal continuation, engagement, or discourse meaning	Often associated with questions, uncertainty, or continuation
Stress pattern	Generally, more predictable; often final in many words	More variable; stress can affect meaning
Rhythm	Often described as more syllable-timed	Often described as more stress-timed
Common learner issue	English statements may sound question-like	Persian-accented intonation may be misread by English listeners

INTONATION PRACTICE – SAY IT OUT LOUD

Please read these 2 sentences *twice* with me.
First in the English way (falling tone ↓).
Then in the Persian way (gentle rising tone ↑).

1. My name is Sara.

- **English intonation:** *My name is Sara*↓
- **Persian-style intonation:** *My name is Sara*↑

2. I work at Los Rios College.

- **English intonation:** *I work at Los Rios College*↓
- **Persian-style intonation:** *I work at Los Rios College*↑

PERSIAN SCRIPT VS. ENGLISH SCRIPT: SPATIAL DIFFERENCES

1. Different Baseline Behavior

Persian handwriting does not rely on baseline alignment in the same way English handwriting does (ا، د، ر، و often float).

2. Different Early Writing Habits

Persian schools teach writing on lined paper, **but** the focus is on *shape, balance, and calligraphy*, not strict baseline precision.



VISUAL ORGANIZATION OF PERSIAN SCRIPT

- **Persian Script (Connected Writing)**

• دانشگاه

- **University**

- Letters connect within words
- Writing flows as a continuous shape
- Readers often perceive the overall word form

VISUAL ORGANIZATION OF ENGLISH SCRIPT

- Example word: **university**

h ↑ ascenders

a c e i m n
----- baseline
g ↓ descenders

Letters are usually **separate in print writing**

- Most letters sit on the **baseline**
- Some letters go **above the line** (ascenders)
- Some letters go **below the line** (descenders)

TEACHING IMPLICATION

- Persian writers are not ignoring handwriting instructions.
- They may be transferring habits from a **connected writing system** where the **overall word shape is more salient**.
- Understanding this helps us respond more constructively when students struggle with handwriting or visual alignment in English.

PERSIAN, FARSI, AND DARI : WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

1. “Persian” is an umbrella term: Persian refers to a group of closely related language varieties.

- **Persian** = the language
- **Farsi** (Iran) and **Dari** (Afghanistan), **Tajik** (Tajikistan)
- Share grammar and writing system (with minor differences)

2. Mutual intelligibility?

- Very high across varieties
- Comparable to **American and Australian English**
- Differences are mainly in **pronunciation, vocabulary, and accent**

DARI VS. FARSI: WHAT TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW

3. Key differences

- **Pronunciation**
- Dari: clearer vowels, slower pace
- Farsi: faster speech, reduced

4. Vocabulary

- Mostly shared; some preferred word choices differ (e.g., *besyâr* vs. *kheyli* for very)

5. Register

- Dari often sounds more formal/polite
- Farsi more conversational

Differences do not create major learning barriers

STANDARD PERSIAN: TEHRANI VARIETY

- Standard form: **Tehrani Persian** (Farsi as spoken in Tehran).

This is the variety used in:

- media (TV and radio)
- education and textbooks
- government communication

WHY TEHRANI PERSIAN BECAME THE STANDARD

- Political and cultural centralization
- Media influence from Tehran
- National curriculum based on this variety
- Widely understood across Iran

DARI AND TAJIK WITHIN THE PERSIAN FAMILY

- **Dari (Afghanistan)** standard: **Kabuli Dari**.
- **Tajik (Tajikistan)** standard: **Dushanbe Tajik**
- All belong to the Persian language family.

Takeaway: Mutually intelligible despite differences in pronunciation and vocabulary.



TEACHING TAKEAWAY

- All are closely related standardized varieties/dialects of Persian
- English teachers can teach both speakers using the **same instructional approach**

PERSIAN & ENGLISH: SHARED ROOTS

Indo-European Family = Shared Ancient Roots

- **mother** > **mâdar**
 - **brother** > **barâdar**
 - **name** > **nâm**
 - **new** > **no**
 - **star** > **setâre** (same Indo-European root)
- * Persian and English are distant relatives

ENGLISH WORDS FROM PERSIAN

- **bazaar** (bâzâr) بازار
- **caravan** (kârvân) کاروان
- **Jasmine** (yâsman) یاسمن
- **aubergine / eggplant** (bâdenjân) بانجان

Often borrowed through Arabic, Turkish, or French

MODERN GLOBAL VOCABULARY

These are used similarly in both languages.

- **internet** (اینترنت)
- **mobile / cell phone** (موبایل)
- **video** (ویدئو)
- **computer** (کامپیوتر)
- **radio** (رادیو)

These connections can be used intentionally in teaching to **reduce anxiety and build confidence** for Persian-speaking students.



A FUN PERSIAN TONGUE TWISTER

Dâyi Châgheh, Châyi Dâgheh

Try saying it fast

Meaning: The uncle is fat; the tea is hot.



GEOGRAPHIC NAMES: PRONUNCIATION CHALLENGE

Can you pronounce these correctly?

English Name	Persian Spelling	Pronunciation
Iran	ایران	<i>Irân</i> (ee-RAAN)
Tehran	تهران	<i>Tehrân</i> (teh-RAAN)
Shiraz	شیراز	<i>Shirâz</i> (shee-RAAZ)
Isfahan	اصفهان	<i>Esfahân</i> (es-fe-HAAN)
Mashhad	مشهد	<i>Mashhad</i> (mash-HAD)
Tabriz	تبریز	<i>Tabriz</i> (tab-REEZ)

GEOGRAPHIC NAMES: AFGHANISTAN

English	Persian	Pronunciation
Afghanistan	افغانستان	af-ghaa-ne-staan
Kabul	کابل	kaa-BOOL
Herat	هرات	he-RAAT
Mazar-i-Sharif	مزار شریف	ma-ZAAR-e sha-REEF
Kandahar	قندهار	qan-da-HAAR
Jalalabad	جلال آباد	ja-la-la-BAAD

TIPS FOR PRONOUNCING PERSIAN NAMES

Stress is usually on the **last syllable**

Arzo (**a-r-ZOO**)

Sara (**sa-RA**)

Elham (**el-HAAM**)

Hossein (**ho-SEYN**)

- Keep vowels **long and clear**.

THE PERSIAN SUFFIX -I / -Y: ORIGIN OR ASSOCIATION

- The suffix -i / -y often means “**from,**” “**related to,**” or “**associated with.**”
- It can show **place of origin, affiliation, or connection.**
- It is similar in function to English endings like **-ian** (Canadian)
- Examples
 - **Kaboli** → from **Kabol**
 - **Shirazi** → from **Shiraz**
 - **Tabrizi** → from **Tabriz**
 - **Esfahani** → from **Esfahan**
 - **Kermani** → from **Kerman**
 - **Yazdi** → from **Yazd**
 - **Tehrani** → from **Tehran**

THE SUFFIX -I / -Y IN NAMES: FAMILY, TRIBE, OR PROFESSION

- The suffix -i / -y can also show **family lineage, tribe, or association**.
- It does **not always mean location**; it can reflect **identity or heritage**.
- **Examples**
- **Mousavi** → associated with the lineage of *Mousa*
- **Hashemi** → associated with the *Hashem* family
- **Rostami** → associated with *Rostam*
- **Qadiri / Ghaderi** → associated with *Qadir*

-I VS. -Y: DIFFERENT SPELLINGS, SAME MEANING

- The endings **-i** and **-y** are the **same suffix**.
- The difference is only in **English spelling** (transliteration).
- **Examples**
- **Shirazi / Shirazy**
- **Tehrani / Tehrany**
- Both forms reflect the same Persian ending: 

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR ESL INSTRUCTORS

- When **a teacher** sees a name ending in **-i / -y**,
- they may provide clues about linguistic or cultural background
- This understanding helps:
 - build **stronger relationships**
 - improve **name pronunciation confidence**
 - support **culturally responsive teaching**

COMMON SUFFIXES & MEANINGS:

PERSIAN (FARSI) NAMES AND SURNAMES OFTEN CARRY MEANING ;THEY ARE NOT RANDOM LABELS.

Suffix	Meaning	Example
-ian / -yan	descendant of / belonging to	Aghayan
-zadeh / -zādeh	born of / child of	Mohammadzadeh
-pur / -pour	son of / lineage of	Akbarpour, Omidpour
-far	holder of / possessing	Navidfar/Omidfar
-nejad	of the family / lineage of	Ahmadinejad/ Omidnegad
-khani	associated with a family/household	Rezakhani/Omidkhani

USEFUL FARSI FOR BUILDING CONNECTION: BASIC GREETINGS

- درود – سلام – *salâm (everyday)* – Dorud
(formal)

Hello / Hi

- حالِ شما چطور؟ – *hâl-e shomâ chetore?*

How are you?

- Informal (Chetore?)

CULTURAL GREETINGS: NOWRUZ & RAMADAN

- Nowruz (Persian New Year)
 - **Nowruz Mobārak** : Happy Nowruz!
- Ramadan (Islamic holy month)
 - **Ramadan Mobārak**: Ramadan Kareem

WELCOMING STUDENTS

- خوش آمدید – *khosh âmadi(d)*
Welcome!
- از آشنایی با شما خوشحالم – *az âshenâyi bâ shomâ
khoshhâlam*
Nice to meet you

تشکر

Tashakur

/tæf·ɑ·kur/

Dari — Afghanistan

Tashakur: This is the word Afghan students carry from home — and the word you can give back to them.

widely used across Persian-influenced languages and cultures, especially in Afghan Dari and Tajik Persian, while “ / متشکرم: moteshakkeram” is more common in Iranian Persian (Farsi); both come from the Arabic root for gratitude and are understood in several regional languages such as Urdu and formal literary Persian varieties.

Tashakur comes from Arabic root shukr (**gratitude**). It is the everyday Afghan word for thank you — not commonly used in Farsi.

How to use it

Say tashakur after a student presents, submits work, or asks a question. Watch what happens.

What it means to them

When a teacher says tashakur, they are not just saying thanks. They are saying: I see your culture. It belongs here.

EVERYDAY POLITENESS

- **Tashakur/mamnun/merci:** Thank you– ممنون / مرسى
- **kheili mamnun:** Thank you **very much**– خيل ممنون
- **khâhesh mikonam:** You're welcome– خواهش مى‌کنم

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS

1. ***movafagh bâshid*** – موفق باشید

I wish you success / Good luck

2. ***âli*** – عالی

Great/Excellent



CLOSING / GOODBYE

1. khodâ hâfez – خدا حافظ

خودرود *Goodbye (common, everyday use)*

2. bedrud – بدرود

Farewell (formal, literary)



TEACHING PERSIAN TO ENGLISH SPEAKERS : KEY CHALLENGES

Sound System

- Persian has several sounds unfamiliar to English speakers:
/kh/, /gh/ (pronounced the **same** in **modern Persian**)
- These are often **back-of-the-throat** sounds.
- Learners may also struggle with long, clear vowels.

EZAFE (ـِ / -E / -YE) STRUCTURE: A LINKING SOUND USED IN PERSIAN

It connects:

- noun + adjective → ketâb-e khub (good book)
- noun + noun (possession) → ketâb-e Ali (Ali's book)

Usually pronounced as -e

After vowels, it becomes -ye

VERB CONJUGATION

Persian verbs change for:

- **person** (I, you, he/she, etc.)
- **tense** (past, present)

Similar to English, but often **more regular and predictable**

Example:

I go → *mirav***am**

He goes → *mirav***ad**

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

- Spoken Persian often **reduces and blends sounds**
- Many **everyday forms** are **colloquial** (not written)
- Learners may understand **written Persian** before **spoken Persian**

Example: 1. How are you? & 2. I want

1. chetor hasti? → more formal / written – **chetori?** → spoken

2. mikham → more formal / written – **mikham** → spoken

VOCABULARY & REGISTER

Formal vs. informal Persian is significantly different

Learners struggle with:

- Polite forms (e.g., you: **shomâ** vs. **to**)
- Cultural phrases (**not always literal**)
- **Indirect communication (ta'arof)**

Example (ta'arof):

“Please, take it” → may not be a real offer, “No, thank you” → may be expected first response

Persian politeness may involve multiple exchanges before acceptance.

6. EXPRESSIONS OF WARMTH, AFFECTION & POLITENESS

(Literal meaning vs. cultural meaning)

- **Ghorbânat beram** → “May I sacrifice myself for you” → expresses **kindness / warmth**
- **Fadât besham** → similar → **affectionate expression**
- **Azizam/Azize delam** → “my dear / beloved”
- **Janam/Joonam & Jan/Joon** → “dear / my life” (in friendly example: Salam, Sara Jan!)

PERSIAN HUMOR & INDIRECT DIRECTNESS 😊

فکر کردی من خرم؟ : (*fekr kardi man kharam?*)

- **Literal:** “Do you think I’m a donkey?”
Natural English equivalent: “Do you think I’m a dummy?” or “You think I don’t know?”
- The word *donkey* has **multiple meanings**, meaning depends on **tone and context**
- Often **used in a playful or teasing way**
- Shows how Persian blends **humor + indirectness**

PERSIAN EMOTION THROUGH LANGUAGE

- **Persian:**
دلم برایتان تنگ شده (*delam barāyetan tang shode*)
- **Literal:** “My heart has become tight for you.”
- **Meaning:** “I miss you.”



TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

1. Recognizing **patterns**, not errors or mistakes
2. Use **visual supports** (sound charts, syntax maps)
3. **Let students explain** their own language logic
4. Treat **multilingual** thinking as **a strength; celebrate** it

TASHAKOR FOR EXPLORING PERSIAN WITH USTODAY

QUESTIONS & CONNECTIONS WELCOME

- **Pair Discussion/reflection (1–2 minutes):**
- What is *one insight* from today that you will bring into your teaching or communication?



Every accent carries a history.

Every learner carries a story.

And understanding both...
is where true teaching begins.

Tashakor again & Khodahafez

