

Book Review

The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian, Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 2020, ISBN 9781138333055 (hbk), 688 pp.

The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian, edited by Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi, is a collection of works which reflects the state of the art in Persian language acquisition. Today, there is a fast-growing number of scientific works on the Iranian languages, including recent edited volumes such as Gernot Windfuhr, *The Iranian Languages*; Anousha Sedighi and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi, *Oxford Handbook of Persian Linguistics*; and Richard K. Larson, Sedigheh Moradi, and Vida Samiiian, *Advances in Iranian Linguistics*.¹ Despite the broad thematic coverage in volumes such as these, notably absent in the literature is a substantial collection of research on Persian language acquisition, a field which has seen exponential growth within the past decades, particularly as Persian-speaking countries continue to play a key role in global politics. As such, demand for learning the Persian language is ever increasing, as is the number of instructors and researchers working to refine Persian pedagogical practices. In light of this, the present volume

¹See, respectively Windfuhr, *The Iranian Languages*; Sedighi and Shabani-Jadidi, *Oxford Handbook of Persian Linguistics*; Larson, Moradi, and Samiiian, *Advances in Iranian Linguistics*.

includes not only the research of leading scholars, but also insights from the vast and valuable classroom experience of the most distinguished educators. The volume consists of an introduction, followed by twenty-eight chapters divided into four thematic parts: (I) 'Theory-driven Research on Second Language Acquisition of Persian'; (II) 'Language Skills in Second Language Acquisition of Persian'; (III) 'Classroom Research in Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian'; and (IV) 'Social Aspects of Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian.' Each part consists of between six and eight chapters.

Following the introduction in Chapter 1, the first part of the book is broadly devoted to research on the acquisition and pedagogy of Persian, which is grounded in and informed by independently motivated theories of linguistics. This part of the book progresses in an orderly fashion along the various modules of language, from topics related to phonetics and phonology to those related to morphology, syntax, and ultimately semantics. In Chapter 2, Reza Falahati examines the acquisition of Persian linguistic competence at the interface of prosody and pragmatics. After providing a thorough overview of previous studies on the acquisition of Persian phonology by non-native speakers, he presents an original study assessing the degree to which advanced second-language (L2) learners of Persian display native-like prosody in informal and formal situations. Chapters 3 and 4 turn to issues surrounding the acquisition of Persian by heritage learners. Yasaman Rafat sets the stage in Chapter 3 by providing a thorough discussion of what constitutes a heritage learner and an in-depth look at previous studies on heritage-language phonology, while in Chapter 4 Karine Megerdooian delves deeper into the specific features and patterns observed in Persian heritage-language speech. Megerdooian is thorough in her presentation of the characteristics of Persian heritage language, addressing peculiarities from all the components of language competency, from phonetics and phonology to morphology, syntax, and pragmatic considerations such as register. In Chapter 5, Azita Taleghani adopts the framework of generative linguistics in looking at the acquisition of negation in the progressive aspect of Persian across three types of learners: monolingual children, heritage learners, and second-language learners. She includes an original study which investigates the use of negation in the periphrastic progressive tenses built on the verb *dāshtan* "to have" by each type of learner, drawing important conclusions based upon the results of the study. The final three chapters of the first part of the book deal with various aspects of semantics in Persian. Chapter 6, by Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi, looks at the acquisition of Persian idioms by second-language learners, including their processing, comprehension, and ultimate storage in the mental lexicon. To shed light on the relevance of extant theories on idiom acquisition in the specific case of the Persian classroom, Shabani-Jadidi presents two previous studies and a novel study examining the interactions of language proficiency and consciousness-raising with respect to the acquisition of idioms. Masoud Jasbi, in Chapter 7, presents an overview of several semantic properties of Persian which not only tend to challenge second-language learners, but are also still hotly debated in various streams of theoretical linguistics. Notably, he addresses the use of bare nominals in Persian when other languages (e.g. English)

would use nominals marked with definiteness or number; the interaction of Persian indefinite markers *ye(k)* and *-i* with the plural morpheme *hā* and the colloquial definite marker *-e*, both of which are said to encode definiteness; and the phenomenon whereby the relative clause marker *-i* is homophonous with the suffixal indefinite marker. Throughout the chapter, Jasbi highlights the distinction between formal and informal Persian and notes that this distinction, despite its relevance in the Persian-speaking world, is rarely addressed systematically in the Persian classroom. In the final chapter of Part I, Marzieh Mortazavinia examines how the semantic features of English *even*, namely its scalar (with respect to salience) and additive component, are expressed in Persian. She shows that Persian makes use of two separate morphemes: *battā* (scalar) and *ham* (additive), and presents a novel study, grounded in the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis, which seeks to understand how L2 learners of Persian deal with this disjunction.

The six chapters in Part II of the book each addresses a specific language skill in the acquisition of Persian by heritage and L2 learners, including vocabulary, grammar acquisition, and the four core skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In Chapter 9, Michael Craig Hillman presents a number of resources and methods for learning and maintaining Persian vocabulary. In doing so, he offers potential solutions to a number of long-standing yet often overlooked issues in the Persian L2 classroom, such as dealing with the reality of diglossia, taking full advantage of the multitude of already familiar English and French loanwords in Persian, and the importance of equipping learners with shortcuts to acquire related word patterns and forms. Behrooz Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari, in Chapter 10, presents a number of the features of Persian grammar which are known to present difficulties to L2 learners, including morphological issues such as number, definiteness, and the postposition *rā*, as well as syntactic issues such as word order and complex clauses. Chapter 11 turns to listening comprehension, where Yass Alizadeh argues for the importance of creating a directed and dynamic approach to building listening skills. She suggests that listening comprehension activities should encourage learners to do more than passively receive information in Persian, but rather actively interpret what they hear in a way that promotes “critical cultural awareness.” She offers a number of ideas on how to incorporate culturally relevant aspects into listening activities by using songs, recipes, and media. In Chapter 12, Musa Nushi outlines the importance of developing speaking skills in the overall progression of an L2 learner. He suggests that speaking, and particularly “comprehensive output,” is a useful tool for speakers to advance in other areas such as grammar and vocabulary, and he presents several research-based suggestions for the types of classroom speaking activities which allow students to practice in meaningful ways. In the following chapter, Nahal Akbari and Ali Reza Abasi offer critical perspectives on various aspects of the acquisition of reading skills by L2 learners. These authors discuss some of the characteristics of Persian orthography which may influence reading fluency and how the script might be modified to ease the learning process, for instance by first exposing learners to fully vowelized Persian texts. Beyond modification of orthography, Akbari and Abasi suggest a number of other strategies for Persian teachers to

enhance the effectiveness of reading activities, including the use of elaborated texts (i.e. genuine texts with scaffolding of sorts) and a focus on developing the micro-skills involved in reading Persian (as opposed to comprehension alone). They authors take great care in identifying gaps in research and proposing extensive and specific topics for future investigation. The final chapter of Part I, Chapter 14 by Ali Reza Abasi, takes a comparable approach to L2 writing in Persian. In particular, he presents writing as a unique vehicle for furthering language learning and stresses the need to craft relevant writing exercises and feedback which are supported in research. He also identifies a number of topics for further research which would aid in shedding light on heretofore unanswered questions regarding effective approaches to second-language writing.

Part III turns to classroom research and specific issues surrounding the current state of Persian language courses and programs. This section begins with Chapter 15 by Mehdi Marashi, who notes a number of important phenomena which have developed in recent decades in Persian-language classrooms, particularly those in the North American university setting. Of special importance, in his view, has been the shift from a relatively homogenous group of L2 Persian learners dedicated to careers in Iranian studies to a more diverse group of students with various backgrounds, ages, and objectives. Marashi outlines the predominant methods which have been used to teach Persian and emphasizes the ongoing shift to more communication-oriented strategies. The authors of Chapter 16, Latifeh Hagigi and Michelle Quay, continue and build upon the theme of communication-based classroom strategies by providing a review of the Communicative Language Teaching method and related strategies such as Task-Based Language Teaching and content-based instruction. These scholars suggest that activities which stress realistic communication tasks (for which they offer a number of resources and detailed suggestions), are an important means to address the diverse levels of proficiency among L2 and heritage learners who are often in the same classroom. In Chapter 17, Daria Mizza and Mohamad Esmaili-Sardari promote a blended learning approach to Persian, in which courses contain both a face-to-face and online component which are complementary and mutually reinforcing. In light of limited classroom time, they argue that a blended approach supports autonomous learning and offers the opportunity for structured, communicative-based activities outside the classroom; however, they stress the crucial role of the teacher in carefully crafting the appropriate balance for an effective blended learning experience. Peyman Nojournian, in the following chapter, elaborates upon the use of technology in developing such communicative and task-based activities. He notes the availability of a plethora of genuine Persian-language material from online media and other sources, while at the same time emphasizing the role of the instructor in selecting and adapting such material based on students' needs and proficiency levels. Chapter 19, by Anousha Shahsavari similarly promotes the use of authentic language materials in the classroom, focusing on the use of Persian literature. Unlike previous approaches to teaching reading through literature, which tend to simplify or modify the text in order to accommodate learners' proficiency levels, the method outlined by Shahsavari leaves the original text unchanged and instead

provides “parallel elaboration”—that is, scaffolding material which accompanies the text side-by-side to empower students in the reading process. From here, the focus shifts in Chapter 20 to courses on Persian literature which are taught in Persian. In this chapter, Asghar Seyed-Gohrab stresses the importance of literature in understanding Persian culture and presents a concise and accessible overview to the most fundamental concepts in Persian literature. Each section is accompanied by a list of sources to aid instructors in developing their own courses. The final two chapters in Part III examine aspects of assessing the proficiency level of L2 Persian speakers. First, in Chapter 21, Amirreza Vakilifard presents information on the recently developed Standard Persian Language Proficiency Test (Persian *Sanjesh-e Estandārd-e Mahārat-hā-ye Fārsī*), which is used increasingly as a requirement for non-Iranian students to gain entry into higher education programs in Iran. As a Persian teacher and a member of the administrative and scientific boards which govern the SAMFA, Vakilifard not only offers unique insights into the challenges and successes involved in the process of developing the test; he also suggests a number of intriguing topics for future research related to standardized tests of Persian. Then, Nahal Akbari takes a broader view of assessment in Chapter 22, where she outlines the basic principles of designing effective tests and discusses some of the key issues surrounding assessment in today’s Persian classroom, including, notably, implementing tests for classes with both L2 and heritage learners. Akbari also highlights the need for teaching methodology and assessment methods to correspond with one another (e.g. task-based testing for a classroom where the primary methodology involves task-based learning).

The fourth and final part of the volume is a collection of chapters on a diverse set of social issues related to Persian pedagogy. This part begins with Chapter 23 by Negar Davari Ardakani, who gives an overview of linguistic diversity in modern-day Iran, sheds light on related issues of social inequality (including the lower literacy rate among speakers of minority languages), and offers perspectives on how Iran can honor, value, and cultivate the linguistic aspect of its rich cultural heritage. The objective of Chapter 24, by Mahinnaz Mirdehghan and Saeed Reza Yousefi, is twofold. First, these authors discuss the classification of Persian varieties into central (official languages Farsi, Dari, and Tajiki) and peripheral (the dialects of the central varieties) and give an overview of Persian-language programs geared toward each of the central varieties. And second, they present the Persian Reference Framework, which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and developed at Shahid Beheshti University. Chapter 25 turns to issues in the acquisition of two specific pragmatic phenomena by L2 learners of Persian, namely conversational implicature and presupposition. Here, Zahra Hamedī Shirvan notes the general dearth of both research and pedagogical materials aimed at the acquisition of pragmatics in Persian. She presents a novel study suggesting that L2 learners have some difficulty acquiring socially constructed and situational usages of language involving implicature and presupposition, but that, interestingly, there is no evidence that the pragmatic skills of L2 learners in Iran are better than those of learners outside Iran. Chapters 26 and 27 focus on the concept of the interlanguage as it relates to Persian. First, Mahbod Ghaffari details the various phonological, morphological,

and syntactic features commonly found in the interlanguage of English-speaking L2 learners of Persian. He contends that an awareness of these mistakes can help teachers anticipate and address them in the classroom. Then, in the latter chapter, Shahrzad Mahootian and Lewis Gebhardt offer additional commentary on interlanguage based on a collection of homework assignments of L2 learners. These authors also include a couple of sections on code switching, which look at both the linguistic features and sociolinguistic motivation for code switching, as well as the treatment of code switching within a generative framework. The goal of Chapter 28, by Azita Mokhtari, is to identify strategies and language learning beliefs held by L2 learners of Persian. Mokhtari includes an original study aimed at gathering data about these topics and concludes that there is room for Persian instructors to engage in constructive discussion with students to improve learning strategies and dispel any unhelpful preconceived notions about learning Persian. In the final chapter of the volume, Ramin Sarraf provides a brief history of the official creation of new vocabulary terms by the Persian Academy and argues that the teaching of neologisms should have a place in advanced Persian-language classrooms.

To conclude, a few key contributions of this volume are worth mentioning. First and foremost, it is noteworthy that Shabani-Jadidi has brought together leading scholars from both the Persian-speaking world and the English-speaking world, thereby creating a cohesive collection of works by authors who may otherwise not have a chance to interact with and build upon each other's scholarship. Additionally, the authors of many chapters not only provide comprehensive overviews of the topic (s) they address, but also complement these overviews with original studies which further shed light on the relevant concepts and debates. Importantly, the chapters are not grounded in a single theoretical framework, but rather consider multiple approaches and take care in assessing the advantages, disadvantages, and ultimately the value of each approach with regard to capturing a particular phenomenon. Because of its breadth and generally accessible style, this work is a valuable resource for researchers, teachers, and even students of Persian, who would surely benefit from the in-depth explanations of some of the most challenging aspects of the language.

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