The American Association of Teachers of Persian

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

A Note from the President

Dear Colleagues,

During the past two years I have had the distinct honor and pleasure of serving as the President of AATP. As my term comes to an end, I am thankful for the opportunity to serve, proud of working alongside an amazing Executive Board and Officers, and delighted to have made collective contributions to the goals of our association. We were able to convene annual in-person and virtual professional panels at MESA and AIS in Denver, Montreal, and Mexico City, honor three distinguished scholars with Lifetime Achievement Awards, establish the AATP Travel Grant to help support graduate students and faculty presenting at conferences on subjects related to Persian pedagogy, and most recently create a graduate student intern position to revamp our online and social media presence. None of this would have been possible without the dedication and support of our Executive Secretary Dr. Sahba Shayani, and our Treasurer Dr. Narges Nematollahi. I am thankful to both for their professionalism and friendship. AATP has been privileged to benefit from the unwavering support of Dr. Latifeh Hagigi and Dr. Farima Mostowfi over the years, and our team is particularly thankful to them for their continued guidance. As I pass the torch to Dr. Peyman Nojoumian as the incoming President, I would like to acknowledge his behind-the-scenes work over several years to support AATP in multiple ways. I am confident that AATP will thrive and move in

new, exciting directions with the incoming leadership team. Finally, I would like to thank every member of our association for your continued support and encourage you to remain actively engaged in a community that is dedicated to the cause of supporting Persian language and culture instructors and programs in higher education.

Sincerely,

Nahal Akbari
AATP President (2022-2024)
University of Maryland, College Park

A Note from the Executive Secretary

Dear Colleagues,

What an incredibly full and rewarding year it has been for the American Association of Teachers of Persian! From Montreal to Mexico City, we have had the privilege of engaging in insightful lectures that deepened our understanding of the intricacies of Persian language pedagogy, as well as celebrating the remarkable and inspiring careers of two of our dear colleagues. Throughout the year, we have shared countless enriching conversations and discussions on a variety of important matters related to our profession and the broader Persian language community.

I am deeply grateful to our outgoing president, Dr. Nahal Akbari, and our treasurer, Dr. Narges Nematollahi, for their unwavering commitment and tireless efforts over the past two years. Their leadership has been instrumental in promoting the values of AATP and advancing our shared mission. Their hard work has not only strengthened the Association but has also inspired all of us to continue fostering excellence in Persian language teaching. While it is bittersweet to bid farewell to them in their current roles, I am excited to work alongside our incoming president, Dr. Peyman Nojoumian, and our new treasurer, Mrs. Banafsheh Pourzangi, in continuing the important work ahead.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you for your ongoing support and active participation in the AATP. It is your enthusiasm and dedication that make our community so special. As we look ahead to the upcoming year, I am confident that we will continue to build on our successes and face new challenges together, with the same spirit of collaboration and innovation that defines this Association.

Here's to another wonderful and fruitful year for AATP!

Warm regards,

Sahba Shayani
Executive Secretary, AATP
Lecturer in Persian Language & Culture, UCLA

A Note from the Treasurer

Dear Colleagues,

It has been a great pleasure to serve as the treasurer of AATP over the past two years. During this time, I became acquainted with and worked alongside many colleagues, learned the basics of bookkeeping, and engaged in several productive discussions about various aspects of Persian pedagogy and the AATP community. I want to thank my friends and colleagues, Dr. Nahal Akbari, the president of AATP, and Dr. Sahba Shayani, the Executive Secretary, for their friendship and support. I learned a lot from both. I am also grateful to Dr. Farima Mostowfi and Dr. Latifeh Hagigi, the executive officers, whose commitment and dedication to AATP's mission were among my initial motivations to join the community. I am pleased to report that as my term concludes, AATP has nine institutional members, reflecting an increase of 80% compared to two years ago, along with thirty-eight individual members. This growth in institutional membership would not have been possible without the efforts of the faculty members at the newly joined universities. I am confident that AATP will continue to thrive under the new executive team, and I wish them all the best in their endeavors.

With warm regards,

Narges Nematollahi,
AATP Treasurer (2022-2024)
Lecturer of Persian, Indiana University, Bloomington

Introduction to AATP's New Executive Board Members

It is with great pleasure that we introduce the newest members of our Executive Board:

Peyman Nojoumian, President

Peyman Nojoumian is a Professor (Teaching) of Persian at the University of Southern California. He holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Ottawa and two master's degrees, one in Speech & Language Technology from KULeuven and another in Teaching Persian as a Foreign Language from Allameh Tabataba'i University. Dr. Nojoumian is the author of the Persian Learner Series, which includes four volumes, a DVD, and a teacher's guide, and has developed a smartphone app dictionary for Persian learners. His recent publications include contributions to *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian* (2020), with a forthcoming chapter in Springer Handbooks. Additionally, he has volunteered for over a decade managing the AATP website and serves on its Executive Board. He is also a certified tester and workshop facilitator for ACTFL OPI, ILR, and WPT.

Banafsheh Pourzangi, Treasurer

Banafsheh Pourzangi is an experienced language educator with over a decade of teaching Persian and French at institutions such as UCLA, UC Irvine, and Santa Monica College. Holding advanced degrees in Persian and French comparative literature from Stendhal III University in France, she specializes in creating dynamic, multicultural learning environments that engage students of all levels. Her teaching philosophy emphasizes compassion and trust, allowing her to connect with students from diverse backgrounds. Known for her innovative approach, she ensures active participation and student success, and regularly contributes to professional workshops and conferences on language instruction.

In 2023 and 2024, AATP continued to expand its reach and strengthen its community. Notably, Peyman Nojoumian was appointed as a new member of the Board's Executive Committee, bringing fresh leadership to the organization. Additionally, Setayesh Nekarae was appointed as the new Webmaster, helping to enhance the organization's digital presence. A significant initiative launched during this period was the creation of a scholarship specifically for academic or graduate students working on Persian-related materials, which supports attendance at conferences such as MESA (Middle East Studies Association) and AIS (Association for Iranian Studies). The Association also forged a number of new and continuing institutional memberships, broadening its network and furthering its mission to support Persian studies. Additionally, the following discussions, panels, and roundtables were convened by the Association in the past two years:

"Enrollments in Persian Language Classes in Higher Education: Current State, Challenges, and Solutions" (Moderated Discussion)

Middle East Studies Association: 57th Annual Meeting,
Montréal, Quebec, Canada
November 2–5, 2023

Moderator: Nahal Akbari

Persian language programs are currently facing a range of challenges due to faculty departures, reduced language requirements, and fluctuating student interest. Many programs are experiencing lower enrollment, particularly in intermediate and advanced courses. For example, some institutions report a decrease in elementary Persian students, with numbers dropping significantly this year. Additionally, several universities have reduced their language requirements or shut down language departments altogether, contributing to declining enrollments. In some cases, programs have been forced to cancel courses, such as second-year Persian, due to faculty retirements or lack of replacement instructors. On a positive note, a few programs continue to maintain healthy enrollments, particularly in introductory courses, with a mix of undergraduate and graduate students.

To address these challenges, several solutions were suggested. One key approach is increasing engagement with the Iranian community, similar to the support other programs receive from their community. Small, consistent financial contributions from alumni or community members could significantly strengthen Persian language offerings. Programs might also consider reaching out to high school students, as early education in the language has proven effective in some regions. Additionally, continuing workshops like those organized by AATP could provide valuable networking opportunities and support for faculty and students. These efforts, combined with targeted financial and community engagement strategies, could help sustain and grow Persian language programs in the face of these challenges.

"Teaching Persian in the Changing World" (Roundtable)

Fourteenth Biennial Iranian Studies Conference,
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México,
Mexico City, Mexico
August 12–15, 2024

Chair: Anousha Sedighi

Language Instructor
Nazila Khalkhali

The podcast Teaching Persian as a Second Language Worldwide led me to see its process from various angles: Learning and teaching language. One of the angles on which I focused my research is a variety of aids, materials, and media, especially the virtual/online ones. Nowadays, distance learning and teaching combine with technological innovations and have entailed a change in the language teaching/learning process. If some years ago, talking about teaching materials meant books or tapes, CDs, and DVDs; now we have to keep in mind the gradual increase in and diversification of online teaching materials. It is an absolute necessity that teachers can perceive both strengths and weaknesses of available teaching aids and can make well-considered judgements as to when, how and to what end they can most effectively manage particular learning & teaching tasks. Online materials & media can be used to support the language learning process. They include online textbooks, dictionaries, podcasts, videos, and social media platforms. In my last research, I tried to find out what sources are available online, how the Persian language teachers use the online materials, and the quality of these materials. The goals of this presentation are: • A classification of the online Persian language materials, including (educational and literary) textbooks, dictionaries, videos/films, audios/podcasts, etc. • The advantages and disadvantages of using these sources for the (adult and young) learners, • A new approach to teaching & learning Persian as a second language in new materials, • The future of online sources for teaching Persian as a Second Language. The research aims to identify the status of Persian Language Teaching/Learning worldwide and the efforts made in the field of teaching & learning Persian as a second language.

Innovative Technology in the Language Classroom: Utilizing Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence in Task-Based Language Teaching
Peyman Nojoumian

The main purpose of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is learning by doing. Virtual Reality (VR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) represent cutting-edge technologies still in development for educational purposes, particularly novel in the realm of Second/Foreign Language Learning. Nevertheless, these technologies hold great potential in enhancing language acquisition by replicating real-life scenarios within the language classroom. AI can automatically generate rich input using various modalities (text, speech, videos, pictures, etc.) for teaching foreign languages. This presentation will demonstrate multiple applications of AI and delve into the technology's future prospects. In an intermediate Persian language class, VR was employed to engage learners in simulated tasks. These tasks encompassed navigating through a virtual map, exploring settings such as a Persian restaurant and a rental home. The activities involved pairs of participants, with one providing instructions and the other following them, fostering interactive communication. A brief video demonstration will showcase these activities, followed by a discussion of the observed outcomes with the participants.

Pragmatic and Interactional Competence at the Advanced Level
Nahal Akbari

One of the key considerations in language teaching at an advanced level and beyond is the learners' development of pragmatic and interactional competence, the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts, and to navigating social exchanges in real situations by taking on the socially accepted role of the listener/speaker at any point (taking turns, interrupting, active listenership, repair, etc.). Given the considerable phonological and syntactic differences between written Persian and spoken Persian, an important component of interactional competence in the language is the control over spoken Persian and the degree of "naturalness" with which learners can engage in various interactions. I will open the conversation around the best ways to incorporate pragmatic and interactional competence into the curriculum, instructional materials, and teaching and assessment practices particularly at an advanced level.

Is Persian to be Taught as a Modern Language or a Classical One: Perspectives and Methodologies
Hossein Samei

Persian is one of the oldest classical languages in the world and, at the same time, the official language of Iran and Afghanistan and Tajikistan with written and spoken registers. While the historical forms of the language and its modern register(s) have many grammatical and lexical elements in common, due to socio-historical changes and evolution, there are many phonetic, syntactic and lexical discrepancies between them, so that, considering Persian as a diglossic language, it remains a major question which form of the language should be emphasized in teaching PSL, and how this decision affects the teaching policies and methodologies. In this regard, three factors should be taken into account: students' motivations, learning objectives, and Persian status in the modern world.

Language Attitude and Language Use among Heritage Persian Learners at the College Level
Anousha Sedighi

The United States hosts the largest population of Iranians outside Iran. There has been a wealth of scholarship on the topic of Iranian diaspora mainly focusing on sociological and anthropological aspects with fewer studies focusing on psychological and linguistic issues. This presentation show-cases new research on the college-level heritage learners of Persian in the United States and tackles a large array of issues such as language attitude, language use, literacy practices in formal and informal domains, identity and belonging, parental and community attitudes, language policy, and language vitality. This is a crucial topic as it has been argued that the third generations of immigrants have almost lost their parental and heritage language. The research draws on data from a mixed-methods study including a questionnaire and informal follow-up interviews. The main data collection tool was a questionnaire consisting of 50 items. The survey was completed by 45 heritage learners of Persian at college level. The questionnaire consisted of the following six sections. The first section was about demographic information. The second section included questions regarding the education level of the participants in the heritage language. The third section was focused on the participants' self-assessment of their proficiency level in the heritage language. The fourth section of the survey focused on the participants' feelings and attitudes towards their heritage language. The fifth section was geared towards the domains of heritage language use. The last section was devoted to the participants' perceived parental attitudes towards their heritage language acquisition and maintenance. All sections included open-ended questions in order to allow the participants to express their feelings and experiences in their own words. The findings of this study have important implications for scholars of heritage languages, educators, curriculum developers, and policy makers.

"Advanced Persian Language Classes: Methods, Challenges, and Innovations" (Panel)

Middle East Studies Association: 58th Annual Meeting,
Virtual
November 11–16, 2024

Chair: Sahba Shayani

Empowering Heritage Language Education through Community-Based Learning: A Critical Examination
Hessam Dehghani

In the realm of advanced Persian language courses, where the focus of the study is more on the content rather than mere proficiency in language, the traditional methodologies often present a uniform portrait of language and a stereotypical image of the Persianate culture, overlooking the rich diversity inherent within heritage communities and the native land alike. This proposal seeks to explore the transformative potential of Community-Based Learning (CBL) as a pivotal alternative to conventional teaching and assessment strategies for heritage language students. Grounded in the principle that community engagement serves as a cornerstone for learning, this approach fosters a dynamic interaction between students and the broader heritage as well as native community, enriching their linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding. Drawing upon Mooney and Edwards' (2001) definition, CBL is characterized as any pedagogical practice that intimately involves the community in the educational process. This method transcends traditional classroom boundaries, facilitating a real-world application of language that nurtures a profound cultural consciousness among heritage students. Through engagement with diverse community members, students not only acquire language skills but also cultivate a critical awareness of their identity, community, and culture, challenging the notion of a monolithic standard language. The significance of this approach lies in its capacity to address the unique challenges faced by heritage learners, who navigate complex identity landscapes shaped by immigration, globalization, and colonization. By integrating critical heritage education within advanced Persian language courses, we aim to provide a more holistic, qualitative, and critical means of assessment. This initiative endeavors to empower students, enabling them to apply language in practical scenarios while gaining a deeper understanding of their linguistic and cultural heritage. Moreover, the critical examination of standard language ideology reveals the necessity for a pedagogy that respects and values the diverse linguistic repertoires of heritage students. Emphasizing the ideological structures that have historically marginalized certain dialects and varieties, this proposal advocates for a shift towards a more inclusive and reflective language education paradigm. In conclusion, this proposal underscores the urgent need for innovative approaches in heritage language education. By leveraging the principles of Community-Based Learning, we aspire to redefine the standards of language proficiency assessment, celebrating the rich tapestry of cultural and linguistic diversity within the Persian-speaking community. Through this endeavor, we aim to foster a generation of learners who are not only linguistically proficient but also critically aware and culturally connected.

Exploring the Transformative Impact of Integrating Shahnameh Stories for Linguistic Growth in Persian Language Learning
Neda Sahranavard
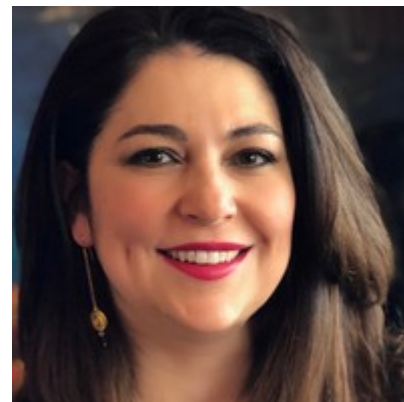
Traditionally, Persian language instruction at the university level has focused on mastering grammatical and rhetorical structures through pre-made exercises and drills. Unfortunately, this approach tends to overlook the cultural and historical nuances inherent in the Persian language. Drawing inspiration from Krashen's compelling comprehensible input hypothesis and incorporating translanguaging, this study aims to explore the integration of Shahnameh stories as a means to enhance advanced Persian language skills. Conducted as a qualitative study at a public U.S. university within an advanced Persian course, the research involved designing a curriculum with a reading and translating component. Students were prompted to read Shahnameh in English and orally translate and present it into Persian. This approach allowed students to leverage their multilingual competence and utilize their entire linguistic repertoire. Analysis of the study's data, including weekly assignments and reflective responses, revealed a clear preference among learners for utilizing their bilingual abilities to enhance their proficiency in Persian. Additionally, engaging with Shahnameh's stories contributed to cultural and historical awareness alongside linguistic proficiency. The presentation will provide a detailed exploration of the course design, highlighting the seamless integration of compelling comprehensible input and translanguaging techniques into Persian language instruction. Furthermore, it will underscore findings that emphasize heightened student motivation, recommending the adaptation of this methodology in various language teaching contexts.

Exploring Complex Conversations in Advanced-Level Language Learning
Farima Sadigh-Mostowfi

Our most important goal in our Advanced I and II classes is to excel in critical dialogue, open-ended conversations, and listening comprehension. In this paper, I hope to explore how we can prepare Advanced Persian students to navigate the more complex aspects of the Persian language to the extent of native speakers in their daily life. How can we use different materials, methods, tools, and resources to enhance the Advanced Persian language learning experience? How can we make Persian culture, art, sports, and other topics more accessible in the classroom? Which authentic materials, such as films, videos, short documentaries, and news articles can be utilized? Which types of media can we use which are relevant for students such as Tik Tok, YouTube, and Instagram? In this paper, we will examine and explain which of these resources are the most efficient and motivating for students, drawing on direct feedback from students and their language journeys.

In Appreciation of Our Institutional Members

We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to our institutional members for their commitment and support of AATP. They are:

- **Indiana University**

- **University of Chicago**

- **University of Maryland**

- **Georgetown University**

- **University of Pennsylvania**

- **University of California, Irvine**

- **University of Southern California**

- **University of California, Los Angeles**

- **Stanford University, Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies**

If your institution is not already a member of AATP, we encourage you to invite your university to join AATP as an institutional member. All institutional members receive one complimentary membership. It is through individual and institutional memberships that our association is able to play an active and engaging role in the community of Persian language teachers. Please consider joining AATP as an institutional member today.

MEHDI KHORRAMI

Dr. Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, Professor Emeritus of Persian language and literature at NYU's Department of Middle Eastern Studies, earned his Ph.D. in French Literature from the University of Texas at Austin in 1996. His research focuses on Modern Persian fiction, stylistics, aesthetics, and sensory language. A founder and co-director of the Association for the Study of Persian Literature, his contributions to Persian studies, contemporary fiction, and Iranian Studies are vast.

Notably, Dr. Khorrami has significantly advanced Persian language education. He authored one of the most widely used Persian textbooks and readers, and has led national language assessment and curriculum development initiatives. He also played a key role in teacher training workshops for Persian and Tajiki instructors both in the U.S. and in Tajikistan.

Recipient of numerous teaching awards, including NYU's Outstanding Teaching Award (1998) and the Golden Dozen Award (2003 and 2009), Dr. Khorrami has been an influential figure in Persian language education. He served as the first president of the Association of Teachers of Persian (2002–2006) and has been on the Board of Directors of the Eastern Consortium for Persian and Turkish since 1997. In honor of his many achievements and services, Dr. Khorrami was the recipient of our Lifetime Achievement Award at the MESA Conference in 2023.

LATIFEH HAGIGI

Dr. Latifeh Hagigi is Professor Emerita at UCLA, in the Iranian Studies Program of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. For over thirty years, she has taught all levels of Persian language and developed curricula that focus on first-time learners and Persian heritage learners. A consistent cornerstone of her teaching has been to encourage student learning through community involvement and service, which not only imparts to her students a deeper love of Persian language and culture, but also contributes to building and strengthening the links between UCLA and the broader Persian-speaking community in Los Angeles. Latifeh's devotion to teaching and its craft have garnered numerous awards and recognition, and in 2011 she became the first faculty member of the Iranian Studies Program to be honored with the prestigious UCLA Academic Senate Distinguished Teaching Award. She is co-author with Professor Emeritus Mehdi Marashi of several textbooks on teaching Persian language and grammar. Her most recent publication is an article co-authored with Dr. Michelle Quay on Persian pedagogy and published in *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian*, edited by Dr. Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi. Latifeh has continued to pursue her own scholarship including publications on Qajar era history. Her contributions to pedagogy as a longtime member of the American Association of Teachers of Persian were recognized in 2024 with our Lifetime Achievement Award. She received her BS in Economics from the National University of Iran (Daneshgah-e Melli) in 1974 and earned her Master's in Iranian studies and her PhD in Middle East Studies–History at the University of Utah.

Member Publications & News

Publications

Mystical Landscapes in Medieval Persian Literature, edited by Fatemeh Keshavarz and Ahmet T. Karamustafa, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. (2025)

The Art of Teaching Persian Literature: From Theory to Practice, edited by Franklin D. Lewis, Asghar Seyed Gohrab, and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi, Leiden: Brill. (2024)

"Persian Literary Translation: A Domain Analysis Survey" in *The Art of Teaching Persian Literature: From Theory to Practice*, edited by Franklin D. Lewis, Asghar Seyed Gohrab, and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi, Leiden: Brill. (2024)

Persian Literary Devices: Eight Essays, edited by Alireza Korangy and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi. London and New York: Springer. (2024)

The Bewildered Cameleer: A Novel of Modern Iran (Sareban Sargardan), by Simin Daneshvar. Translated by Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi and Patricia Higgins. Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers. (2023)
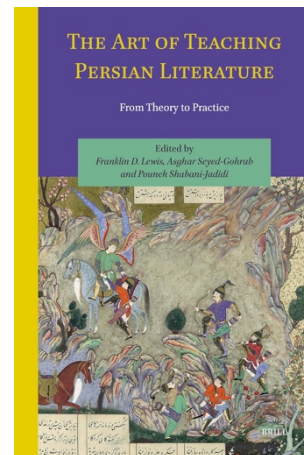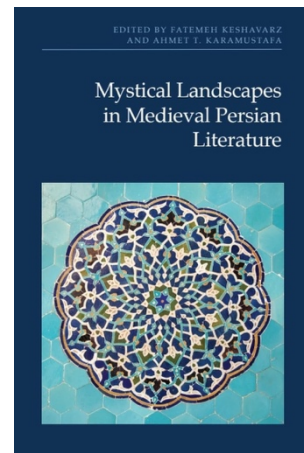
News

- Virtual lecture series entitled, "Literature in Persian Language Pedagogy" sponsored jointly by The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of Toronto, and the Department of Middle Eastern Studies and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago. This lecture series ran through the 2024 winter and spring quarters as well as 2024 fall quarter. The lecture series continues to run through the 2025 winter, spring, and fall quarters.

- Congratulations to Farima Sadigh-Mostowfi (Georgetown University) on being promoted to the rank of Full Teaching Professor in 2024.

- Congratulations to Anousha Sedighi (Portland State University) on being elected as a Council Member for the Association for Iranian Studies. Professor Sedighi previously served as the president of the AATP during 2014–2016.

- Congratulations to Mahbod Ghaffari (University of Cambridge) on being awarded the 2024 Pilkington Prize for Teaching Excellence.