

Introduction

Background

During the past three decades, proficiency-based instruction has received increased attention in the teaching of foreign languages. The joint efforts of major professional organizations, including the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR), have resulted in the development of guidelines for proficiency-oriented programs. The guidelines thus developed are modeled on the *Functional Trisection*, often referred to as the cornerstone of the proficiency guidelines, which were originally developed by Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) and adapted later by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) for academia. More recently, the National Middle East Language Resource Center (NMELRC) and National Flagship Language Initiative (NFLI) have been active in the establishment of national proficiency goals for languages of the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the development of proficiency-oriented guidelines and adequate instructional materials in less commonly taught languages, such as Persian, has lagged behind. For the languages of the Middle East in general, with the exception of Arabic and Hebrew, guidelines for proficiency-based instruction are not yet available, this in spite of individual attempts made to apply the proficiency guidelines to lower-division courses offered in Turkish and Persian in various academic settings. Even today, an examination of existing Persian textbooks taught in Iran and in US universities reveals that most are organized around the traditional grammar and translation methodologies. Reading selections used in these textbooks are mostly from sources that contain archaic forms and styles no longer used in contemporary Persian, particularly in the spoken mode. Similarly, a common tendency in such textbooks and methods of instruction is to disregard discourse and communication skills of contemporary usage.

The Project

The situation outlined above seems more anomalous when we take into consideration recent advances in pedagogical methodologies applied to the teaching of foreign languages on the one hand and the considerable increase in demand for the teaching of languages such as Persian. To remedy that situation, in the summer of 2004, the Persian Board of NMELRC, consisting of M. R. Ghanoonparvar (University of Texas, Austin), Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak (University of Maryland), Mohammad-Mehdi Khorrami (New York University), Mehdi Marashi (the University of Utah), and Kamran Talattof (University of Arizona), submitted a proposal to NMELRC aimed at designing, developing, and delivering the basic guidelines for curriculum development in elementary and intermediate Persian. Having received the approval of NMELRC, the Persian board has produced the following guidelines.

In the following guidelines, the main focus has been to streamline or integrate, as much as possible, the efforts of students, teachers, materials developers, and administrators into a skill-based system of language pedagogy in accord with the proficiency guidelines, as adopted for the Persian language. As such, a key concern in the process of developing these guidelines has been the professionalization of the pedagogic process. It is expected that this approach would lead to more or less similar skills being taught by different teachers at diverse institutions, even if and when they offer the language at different paces and emphasize different skills. While emphasizing incremental advances in the language learning process, the guidelines that follow are flexible enough to allow sufficient variation to make individual initiative not just possible but a positive addition to the classroom experience. Thus, those teachers who may prefer privileging speaking and comprehension as well as those foregrounding the scholarly approach to language learning with emphasis on reading and text-based experiences will be able to use these guidelines or a modified version of them. In short, the effort in developing these guidelines has been directed in such a way as to make it possible – and easy – for different Persian programs with diverse needs and aims to benefit from various components of these guidelines.

Important Considerations

In developing the guidelines that follow we have adapted certain principles and models, divisions and classifications, and theories and assumptions. The most notable among these are:

- 1) The proposed guidelines are divided into 60 units, each corresponding approximately to one week of instruction or 4-5 contact hours. Therefore each 15 units correspond to one semester of instruction for universities that operate on a semester basis, 10 per quarter for those on a quarterly system. Still, various Persian programs in American universities follow different models for their first and second year and therefore instructors should feel free to adopt the divisions in these guidelines accordingly.
- 2) The guidelines allow the full integration of the four language skills and culture. We believe that without that cultural orientation, mastery of the Persian language remains partial and incomplete. Therefore, the topics and the accompanying activities outlined here have a cultural content, which is why we have included a checklist of cultural topics in the guidelines. Such a list can serve as a useful index of cultural information, customs, attitudes, and values. In the hands of curriculum developers, textbook writers, and Persian instructors, this cultural component can be made to constitute one of the liveliest and most significant aspects of the learning experience.
- 3) Besides the column on culture, the guidelines include three components: a) Functions/Strategies b) Topical Domain, and c) Structures. Functions/strategies refers to a set of tasks and activities that language users must be able to perform at a given level of proficiency; they consist of those categories of “action” or “event” which students are expected to master or be exposed to. The activity in question often follows the phrase

“talking about . . .”. However, as envisioned here, “talking’ about activities does not just mean conversation. The phrase is meant to signal a series of “language” events that may include watching or listening to real or simulated scenes, play-acting, partnering with real or imaginary persons, or similar experiences as devised or seen fit by the teacher. Also, some functions are repeated in different units, marked by Roman numerals. In such cases students are expected to perform indicated tasks at different levels of complexity.

4) In the second category, Topical Domain, specific suggestions are made to assist instructors with contexts/situations within which appropriate materials could be developed. Thus the relationship between the Functions column and the Topical Domain column is often that of an activity to an appropriate example, a life situation, a locus, or an item that anchors the function at hand and makes it concrete and palpable. For instance, in unit one “loan-words” in the topical domain column signals that words such as “mersi” (from French, meaning “thanks”) can be useful to teach a frequently heard word and to recognize the letters in it when encountering its written form. Similarly, in item 14 the topical domain of a restaurant is suggested as a natural match for the function of speaking about Persian cuisine. All such correspondences will be further amplified in a later stage when we develop the supplementary material that will go with each of the 60 items outlined here.

5) The third category, Structures, includes predominantly grammatical structures. In fact, Grammatical Structures was the phrase chosen for this column in an earlier draft, before we decided to take out the designation “grammatical” because we thought in some cases it might not apply and may therefore be misleading. In some such cases important lexical topics are mentioned. In general, this column has developed more on the basis of conjecture than any other column; we have simply noted our best guess about what functions and topics may best fit what Persian phrases, containing a grammatical point or an enriching lexical component. Because of that, this column also invites the greatest amount of creative contribution from the teacher in the classroom. Teachers should feel free to use their own ways of determining the structures that best connect the function and topic at hand to a deep-structure understanding of the language and mastery of, or exposure to, its workings.

6) The close interrelation of functions/content/grammar represents communicative and linguistic aspects of the language. While content involves the “message” of the lesson, whether it is conversation, reading/writing, or cultural topics, grammar represents the linguistic code. The grammatical structures in these guidelines follow a systematic, small step progression. In this way, the three components – Functions, Topic, and Structure – are integrated with culture and vocabulary as closely as possible. For that reason, knowing that proficiency guidelines usually do not include a culture column, we have nevertheless added a checklist of selected cultural topics simply to assist instructors and materials developers in their ultimate task of integrating language and culture. In doing so, covering the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing has been a primary principle.

7) It should be obvious that these guidelines are informed essentially by the Communicative Approach to language learning. Equal access to the four skills of writing, reading, listening and speaking has been a primary principle. Thus the terminology used in the category of Functions/Strategies should not be interpreted as though certain skills have priority. Indeed, instructors and materials developers are encouraged to address the four above-mentioned skills in every unit and with regard to each stated function. A second organizing principle has been to proceed from simpler topics to more difficult and more complex ones. While we think the guidelines represents a sequence of topics that are logical and useful to university students, teachers should feel free to change the order of presentation as they see fit, or as dictated by the textbooks they use or methodologies they may have already devised.

8) The guidelines focus on the meaningful use of spoken and written Persian rather than on the traditional structural orientation. In creating the proposed guidelines for Persian courses, the main objective has been to respond to the needs of the students and to define what the students should be able to do with Persian. Still, the guidelines that follow should be seen only as one of several tools that can help to attain higher levels of proficiency in Persian. They make no statement about textbooks, methodologies, syllabi, lesson plans, and classroom activities. It is the responsibility of curriculum developers, textbook writers, and classroom instructors to design curricula, materials and appropriate activities considering the specific needs, purposes and interests of their students.

As mentioned in the preamble, little recent research has been conducted and few findings are available relative to teaching Persian as a foreign language based on the proficiency system. The developers sincerely hope that with participation of other colleagues in this and related projects a consensus will emerge within our profession in the near future.

Unit	Functions / Strategies	Topical Domain	Structures	Culture
1	Greetings / Learning the alphabet	Greetings / Cognates / Sample Greetings / Loan Words	Sounds of the Alphabet	Greetings
2	Learning the alphabet	Greetings / Cognates / Loan Words		Greetings
3	a) Salutations (appropriate greetings for different times of the day) b) Asking and saying your name c) Understanding different levels of speech: تو / شما، او / ایشان [ایشون] d) Saying where a person is from	a) Short conversations between student and professor (formal) and student and student (informal) b) First day of class: Instructor and students introduce themselves c) Student party: Students become acquainted with each other	a) Subject pronouns b) Verb “to be” Present Tense	Explanation of formal / informal
4	a) Identifying objects (این چی؟) b) Identifying Possession (مال من) c) Talking about Fields of study: شیمی، فیزیکی، زبان، فارسی، تاریخ	a) Conversation among students about their fields of study b) Conversations about objects in classroom	a) verb “to have” & to study b) این، آن [اون]، c) Counting from 0 to 20 d) Plural: ها، ان	Gestures / Pointing Gestures / Eye Contact

Unit	Functions / Strategies	Topical Domain	Structures	Culture
5	a) Naming your belongings b) Talking about your courses / languages c) Talking about people	a) Conversation among students about their easy and difficult courses: سخت / آسان [آسون]، خوب / بد b) Conversation among students about their classmates	a) Modifiers b) <i>Ezafeh</i> construction c) Verbs “to know someone” & “to know something”: دانستن [دونستن]، شناختن	Titles of address and reference: آقا، خانم، استاد
6	a) Identifying members of family b) Talking about family members c) Asking about family members	a) Vocabulary, immediate family b) Conversation, question / answer about immediate family / question words: چند، کی، کجا من چاهار [چار تا] برادر دارم.	a) Interrogative sentences b) Personal pronouns continued c) attached pronouns: تا، ب، کتابت d) Question words که (کی)، کی، چه (چی)، چند، کجا e) Classroom expressions: تکرار کنی، تلفظ کنی، هجی کنی	Family relations
7	a) Talking about your house / apartment / dorm b) Providing your home address c) Giving names and locations	Living situations	a) Compound verbs زندگی کردن، درس خواندن، تکرار کردن b) Interrogative sentences c) Question words continue	Iranian homes, modern & traditional
8	a) Talking about your schedule b) Naming colors of objects	a) Days of the week b) Months, seasons c) Colors	a) Compound verbs / negative b) Cardinal and ordinal numbers	Persian days of week, Iranian calendar, Iranian Flags Weekdays: چند شنبه

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9	a) Talking about the weather b) Asking someone out to a movie	a) The weather and climate b) Movies	a) Present progressive b) Suffix: ی ن س بت	Dating / meeting in Iran
10	a) Asking about past events b) Telling time	a) Exams / quizzes / tests b) Time vocabulary	Simple past tense	Sports and entertainment
11	a) Asking about / describing past events b) Talking about personal information: age, birthday, nationality	a) A recent party b) A birthday party	a) Possessive attached pronouns b) Present Perfect c) Comparative and superlative adjectives	old / young Birthday party Teenage years / youth / maturity Age: بزرگتر، سن کوچکتر
12	Discussing a recent trip to Iran	a) At a travel agency b) Places visited	a) Present perfect b) Past perfect	Historical sites

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13	Shopping	a) At a clothing store b) Colors, Prices, Sizes	a) Past progressive b) Special compound verbs: خوش آمدن، بد آمدن	Dress code Bargaining Varieties of shops
14	a) Talking about Persian cuisine b) Giving directions to places	a) At a restaurant, ordering food b) Directions to library and to local ethnic restaurants	a) relative pronoun and conjunction: که and the function of: که b) The imperative بدهید [بدهید]، بی‌اورید [بی‌ارید / بی‌ارین] c) Exclamatory expressions	Cuisine / Eating habits / Table manner
15	Talking about marriage	An upcoming wedding of a friend or a relative	a) Present subjunctive b) Future tense	Wedding vows, wedding party Bridal chamber
16	Naming different professions / talking about the professions of family members, friends / asking for information	Graduation ceremonies	a) What does your father do? پدرت چه کار می‌کنه؟ پدرت چه کاره اس؟ b) Transitive / intransitive verbs	Job ads Perceptions of occupations, social hierarchy, status of a profession, titles

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17	a) Naming and describing sports and hobbies b) Giving and getting information about different hobbies	Sports, recreation, hobbies	a) Compound verbs زمین خوردن، بازی کردن، کوهنوردی کردن b) <i>Ra</i> = direct object marker, specificity marker, and other functions of post position را	Wrestling, soccer, polo Leisure in Iranian culture
18	Talking about lodging: reserving a hotel room / apartment hunting / reading advertisements	At a real estate agency	a) Past progressive, revisited b) Subordinate clauses and sentence Connectors و، ولی، اما c) Question words: چند، چقدر، چقدر d) Compound adjectives یه اتاقه، دو اتاقه	Hotel Abbasi in Isfahan Mortgage: رهن، گرو
19	a) Inviting someone for food and dining b) Planning a dinner party	Food and drink	a) Prepositions: review b) Object pronoun c) Polite expressions / offering and accepting invitations / gifts	Eating etiquette, <i>ta'arof</i>
20	Asking about and discussing menus; making reservations; talking about cooking, recipe, preparing a Persian main / side courses	Menus, recipes	a) Levels of imperative b) Introduction of conditional sentences	Traditional and contemporary foods / restaurants

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21	a) Planning daily / weekly schedules b) Detailing your daily schedule	Daily routine Academic schedule	Conditional sentences	Iranian weekends / holidays Work / environment / habits / concept of time
22	a) Shopping for clothes: talking about price, negotiating price b) Expressing wishes / desires / wants / needs	New Year Celebrations Careers	a) Review of models / auxiliaries b) Varieties of conjunctives هم...هم نه...نه یا...یا چه...چه	Bazaar New Year Pilgrimages Iranian calendar Fortune telling
23	Making a phone call	a) Formal conversation with colleagues a) Response to a job ad c) Chatting	a) Direct / indirect speech مگر، مگر اینکه	Telephone etiquette
24	a) Making a doctor's appointment b) Explaining your physical condition c) Buying your prescription	a) At a doctor's office b) At a hospital c) At a pharmacy	a) دو روز است که ... دو سال است که... b) Negative adjectives نا + صفت / غیر + صفت صفت بی + بدون + صفت	Traditional / modern medicines گرمی / سردی عقل سالم در بدن سالم است.

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25	a) Planning for holidays b) Preparing for the New Year c) Buying sweets d) Exchanging gifts	Persian New Year, house-cleaning, the <i>haft sin</i> table	a) Pronoun usage and function b) The use of suffix pronouns with verbs خری دم‌ش	Significance of the Persian New Year / gift exchange Christmas in Iran Iranian calendar II
26	a) Shopping for grocery items b) Preparing for <i>sizdah bedar</i>	<i>Sizdah bedar</i>	a) Rules about written / spoken language b) Stylistic variations in Persian and derivational suffixes: خوردنی، شن‌ی‌دنی، ی‌دنی، گفت‌نی	<i>Sizdah bedar</i> Dowreh Numerology
27	Planning for winter / summer vacation	Tourist guides, maps, travel brochures	Subjunctive; review	City and country
28	Calling a cab	Buses, telephone taxis, taxis	a) The function of <i>khod</i> : reflective, emphatic, common pronoun b) Reflexive pronouns ت خودم، خود	Tehran traffic Modes of transportation in Iran

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29	a) Reporting an accident b) Calling a medic	Scenes of accidents, police stations, fire departments, medics	a) Passive voice b) Review of transitive / intransitive verbs	Driving in Tehran Emergency services in Iran
30	a) Planning a plane trip b) Talking about transportation	Travel agency / airport terminals / airline offices	Review of tenses Intonation / action	Nationwide railroad, Homa (Iranian National Airlines)
31	a) Writing a report on a movie or a book b) Registering for a class	a) At a book circle b) At the advising office	Impersonal structures باید گفت می شد رفت می توان دید	a) Study / reading habits b) College entrance exams
32	a) Sending a gift b) Writing and sending letters	a) Persian carpets b) At the post office	Causative verbs نشان دن شناسان دن خوابان دن خوران دن	Kelims /carpets/ banknotes / stamps

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33	Talking about print media in Iran	Newspapers and Magazines Journalistic jargon	Arabic elements in Persian/ broken plurals	Freedom of speech
34	Talking about personal hygiene and health	a) Anatomy, body parts b) Two patients talking about health and common ailments	a) Use of indefinite and diminutive markers: ی نکره ی نسبی b) Indefinite suffix pronouns c) Attached pronouns چه + ضمیر	Cultural significance of gestures, body language
35	Talking about falling in love, marriage, divorce	In a coffee shop	a) Prepositions b) Habitual past c) Pronouns + prepositions از + ش با + ت	Iranian weddings
36	Talking about Iranian cinema	a) At a theater b) At a film festival	Direct and indirect speech	Cinema and dramatic arts

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37	Talking about occupations, specializations	At an ICU At a computer firm	a) Adverbs b) Adverbial phrases / clauses	Women in the job market
38	Talking about countries and cultures	Nationality and ethnicity Iranian-American communities	Prepositional phrases and linking words به این که با توجه علی رغم این که اگر چه به نظر من از نظر من به عقیده من	The Los Angeles experience / Expatriate Iranians
39	Talking about regions in Iran	Villages, agricultural products	Suffixes for professions, suffixes for places	Map of Iran, provinces, cities, nomads and nomadic life
40	Talking about history	Monuments and museums A visit to a cultural site	Historical present	History and heritage

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41	Planning for entertainment	a) At a concerts, in a restaurants b) Picnicking in a park	a) Lexical variations: بفرمائی، بنشین، بتمرگ b) <i>Ra</i> : continues, omission of را	Social register
42	Talking about accidents, crimes and punishment	Police stations, courts	a) Passive voice: continues آلوده شدم زده شدم b) Causative and compound verbs: باعث شدن منجر شدن	The Justice system in Iran
43	Opening a bank account	At a bank	a) Compound verbs with prepositions (pre-verb) b) Coordinating conjunction نه تنه... بلکه... هر چه، هر جا	Public and private sectors, NGOs in Iran
44	Talking politics	On the campus and outside	Synonyms and antonyms	The Iranian Revolution

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45	Talking about religions and sects	Islam, the Baha'i faith, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism	Arabic elements and expressions in Persian II	Religions in Iran
46	Talking about Iran's geography in detail	Locations, mountains, bodies of water, neighbors; in a high school geography class	Verbal nouns Past stem plus suffixes گفتار، دیدار	Peoples of Iran, dialects of Persian
47	Interpreting fiction	A short story	Further distinctions between written / spoken language	Biography of a writer
48	Interpreting poetry	A modern and a classical poem	a) Poetic structures b) Poetic syntax	Major poets

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49	Talking about the economy	Economic reports / articles in newspapers and magazines	Numbers, decimals, fractions, percentages	Iranian economy
50	Talking about gender and class	Radio reports and commentaries	Present stem plus suffixes نویس + نده ساز + نده	Youth centers in Iran
51	Talking about team sports	At the Azadi stadium	a) Compound verbs and nouns b) Loan words	Soccer matches in Iran
52	Talking about government structures	Governmental branches, elected / non-elected officials, government institutions	a) Political jargons b) Word coinage	Majles, the Iranian parliament

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53	Talking about the military	The Iran-Iraq war	Use of past tense form to indicate future actions	Military ranks, weaponry, the draft in Iran
54	Interviewing a playwright	a) At a theater b) An interview with a playwright	a) Different registers of language پس، چرا که، در رابطه با، بالعکس، علی‌رغم، ناگزیری از، لاجرم، می بایست، بایست، بایست	Biography of a playwright
55	Talking about animals	At the zoo	Idioms and phrases related to animals	Animal fables in Persian
56	Talking about nomadic life	Bakhtiaris, Qashqa'is, and other tribes	a) Compound words (verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs) continues b) Structure of a paragraph I	Depictions of nomadic tribes

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57	Talking about information technology and the Internet	a) Persian websites b) At an internet café	a) Computer and information terminology in Persian b) Structure of a paragraph II	Iranian websites and bloggers
58	Talking about rituals	Ramazan, Moharram, and other religious rituals	a) Review of the subjunctive b) Structure of a paragraph III	<i>Ta'zīyeh</i> , and other rituals
59	Talking about the environment	Pollution in Tehran	a) Review of conditional sentences b) Structure of a paragraph IV	Damavand Peak, the Alborz mountain range
60	Talking about energy	Oil fields in Iran, An oil refinery in Iran	a) Review of subordinate clauses b) Phrases: به تناسب، به نسبت نسبت به، به نسبت	History of Oil Exploration and Exportation in Iran