

The Routledge Introductory Persian Course: ***Farsi Shirin Ast***

Pouneh Shabani Jadidi and
Dominic Parviz Brookshaw

فارسی شیرین است
پونه شعبانی جدیدی
و
دومینیک پرویز بروکشا

شعبانی جدیدی، پونه، ۱۳۴۹ - Pouneh, Shabani Jadidi
The Routledge Introductory Persian Course: Farsi shirin ast.
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تهران: سخنکده، ۱۳۹۰ = ۲۰۱۱ م.

۲۸۴ ص.: مصور.

۹۷۸-۶۰۰-۶۱۰۰-۷۲-۶

فارسی-انگلیسی

فارسی -- کتاب‌های درسی برای خارجی‌ان - انگلیسی

فارسی -- راهنمای آموزشی - خارجی‌ان

فارسی -- دستور -- راهنمای آموزشی

رده بندی کنگره: الف/ش ۷ ۱۳۹۰ / PIR۲۸۳۹

رده بندی دیویی: ۴/۲۴۲۱۶۸

شماره کتابشناسی ملی: ۱۵۱۷۶۲۵



The Routledge Introductory Persian Course: Farsi shirin ast.

ناشر: سخنکده

نویسندگان: پونه شعبانی جدیدی، دومینیک پرویز بروکشا

تیراژ: ۲۵۰۰ نسخه

چاپ اول: ۱۳۹۰

قیمت به همراه دیسک فشرده: ۱۲۰۰۰ تومان

شابک: ۹۷۸-۶۰۰-۶۱۰۰-۷۲-۶

The Routledge Introductory Persian Course: Farsi shirin ast.
Published in the USA and Canada by Routledge.

ISBN: 978-0-415-56100-6

First Edition: 2010

Published in Iran by Sokhankadeh Pub.

ISBN: 978-600-6100-74-6

First Edition: 1390 Jalali

Price in Middle east: \$18(USD)

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Acknowledgements

We would like first of all to thank the previous and current Directors of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, Professor Robert Wisnovsky and Professor Jamil Ragep, for their generous support, which was vital to the realization of this project. The vision of Andrea Hartill, Samantha Vale Noya, Geraldine Martin and their colleagues at Routledge has been another crucial factor in the publication of this book. We would also like to thank our respective colleagues at the University of Manchester and McGill University, Fahimeh Zolfi-Sistani and Ladan Hamedani, who used earlier versions of the material contained in this coursebook in their classes, and whose comments on these earlier versions proved most useful. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers selected by Routledge who gave us detailed and constructive comments on earlier drafts. We are also grateful to Sina Maftoon and Ladan Hamedani for assisting with the audio recordings for the book. Finally, we would like to thank our students whose feedback was invaluable as we worked on revising the manuscript.

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Introduction

The Routledge Introductory Persian Course: Farsi Shirin Ast is a coursebook intended for the instruction of modern Persian language at university level. It is not a “reach yourself” book, but it has been designed to be as user-friendly as possible. The subtitle of this coursebook, *Farsi Shirin Ast*, means “Persian is sweet”. We believe learning a language should be an enjoyable experience, and we have designed this coursebook in such a way that it will appeal to both student and instructor alike. The formal, written Persian presented in this coursebook is that of contemporary Iran, although the considerable overlap in written Iranian Persian (*Farsi*) and written Afghan Persian (*Dari*) is so great that Persian learners intending to use their language within a formal Afghan context will also find this coursebook of benefit.

☐ The authors

The Routledge Introductory Persian Course: Farsi Shirin Ast is co-authored by Dr Pouneh Shabani Jadidi, Faculty Lecturer in Persian, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada and Dr Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, Lecturer in Persian Studies and Iranian Literature, University of Manchester, England. Each author has brought her/his particular expertise and experience gained through many years teaching Persian language at university level to the creation of the material presented here. Dr Pouneh Shabani Jadidi holds a PhD in Education from the Islamic Azad University in Tehran, and is currently completing a second PhD in Persian Linguistics at the University of Ottawa. Dr Dominic Parviz Brookshaw holds a DPhil in Persian Literature from the University of Oxford. Between them, the authors boast over a decade of experience in the field of Persian language instruction. Dr Shabani Jadidi taught translation and linguistics at Islamic Azad University in Tehran from 1997 to 2004 and has taught Persian language at McGill since 2006. Dr Brookshaw taught Persian language and literature at the University of Oxford from 2003 to 2005, and then at McGill University from 2005 to 2007. Since 2007 he has taught Persian language and literature at the University of Manchester.

☐ The language instruction approach used in this coursebook

Unlike traditional approaches to language teaching, which are based on developing the *grammatical competence* of second/foreign language students, more recent approaches to teaching second/foreign languages have instead focused on *communicative*

competence. In traditional methodologies which emphasize grammatical competence, the focus is on the sentence, which can often result in students being unable to actually use the language in context. Learning the target language in isolated sentences can lead to learners becoming unable to deal with more complex portions of written language, such as paragraphs and short texts. This is why in this book, from the very first lesson, students are exposed to dialogues, and in later lessons, to short texts. Coursebooks which focus primarily on the production or translation of single sentences in the traditional grammar translation method create a language learning process that is synthetic and artificial, rather than authentic and automatic. More up-to-date methodologies which focus on communicative competence, however, place less emphasis on the explicit or direct teaching of grammar and instead stress language use and implicit or indirect instruction of grammar. This does not mean that formal instruction of grammar should be eliminated altogether, since adult learners have the ability to perceive abstract information. In fact, the contextualized formal instruction of grammar is arguably the most effective approach in adult second language learning. Students learn more successfully when they approach a second/foreign language as a means for acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself. In addition, language instruction is more efficient when all four skills of language learning (i.e. listening, reading, writing and speaking) are simultaneously practised within a true-to-life context in the target language. Content-based materials, such as those presented in this coursebook, provide such a comprehensive context for language instruction. Through a varied range of materials, the student's attention is focused on learning the content (whether vocabulary or grammatical constructions) on a more subconscious level, which is the level at which language acquisition occurs more successfully. In such an interactive content-based classroom, the student-teacher roles shift as the student and the teacher become collaborators in the language acquisition process. A student-centered atmosphere in the classroom boosts the students' motivation and self-confidence, while minimizing their affective inhibitions and stress. In such an atmosphere, students take the lead and the teacher follows, facilitating the flow of the lesson.

□ The structure of the coursebook

The Routledge Introductory Persian Course: Farsi Shirin Ast contains 15 lessons. Each lesson (apart from Lesson 1 in which the Persian alphabet and writing system are introduced) is composed of several sections, each designed to integrate language learning skills and facilitate language acquisition:

- A title in the form of a question followed by a photographic image and accompanying caption which should be used as the basis for pre-reading tasks.
- A vocabulary section in which Persian words are presented along with their English equivalent(s). In the vocabulary table, the part of speech of each new item is

presented (in Persian), and a Persian sentence is provided where the new word is used in context (with accompanying English translation in Chapters 2–5).

- A dialogue, followed by comprehension questions in Persian.
- An explanation in English of the grammatical point(s) introduced in the dialogue, which includes Persian example sentences, usually accompanied by an English translation (see below). We have intentionally made these grammar explanations in English as brief as possible, since our preference is for the acquisition of Persian grammar *implicitly*, rather than *explicitly*.
- A short text in which the implicit focus is on the new grammatical point(s) introduced in the lesson, followed by comprehension questions in Persian.
- Additional exercises for students to practise the grammar and vocabulary introduced in the lesson. These take a variety of forms: multiple-choice, fill in the blanks, translation, word reordering, sentence completion, etc.
- A colloquial situational dialogue, followed by a table showing the relationship between the formal (or literary) and colloquial words and expressions used, as well as some additional related vocabulary so that students can recreate similar situational dialogues by substituting the words used in the original dialogue with other related words. The colloquial Persian presented in these sections (collectively entitled, *Dar shahr cheh khabar-eh?* “What’s going on in town?”), is the informal spoken dialect of Tehran, which is the most widely understood colloquial form of Persian.

The coursebook ends with two comprehensive vocabulary sections, one Persian to English, the other English to Persian which includes the words introduced in the individual vocabulary sections at the beginning of each lesson with their English equivalent(s). There is also an index of grammatical terms at the very end of the book which students and instructors can use to easily locate where a particular grammar point is discussed in the coursebook.

■ How to use this coursebook

The title of each lesson is in the form of an engaging question in Persian which relates to the subject of the dialogue or the short text (or both) and which the instructor should use as a pre-reading exercise to prepare students for the topics covered in that lesson. In doing so, a connection will be made between the students’ old information, and the new information being presented to them, thereby resulting in the internalization of the new information. The title is followed by a photographic image with an accompanying caption in Persian which the instructor can either use at the beginning as an aid to further discussion (along with the title), or else at the end of the lesson once the dialogue and short text have been covered. Each photo caption ends with an invitation to the students to do a brief websearch (in Persian script) to find out more about the subject of the

photograph. The information the students find via the websearch can be discussed in brief before moving on to the next lesson. By making the title of each lesson a question in Persian, and providing each image with a Persian caption, we encourage students from the very beginning of the course to engage with Persian directly, rather than indirectly (through, say translation or transliterated Persian). Wherever possible (and with increasing frequency as the lessons progress), instructions are given in Persian, rather than English, for the same purpose.

The vocabulary section includes example sentences as well as parts of speech so that students can learn from the very beginning of their encounter with Persian how to use each word in context, as well as to identify its grammatical usage. These example sentences are introduced from the first lessons so that the students are exposed to a large amount of passive vocabulary and grammar required to gradually better comprehend the target language. In the first few chapters (2–5), English translations are provided for these example sentences to ease students into engaging with the passive vocabulary and grammar. After the first few lessons, the students can be asked to make similar sentences in Persian to the example sentences provided in the book, and – with the aid of a dictionary – translate the example sentences into English either in class, or else as a homework exercise. Putting their new vocabulary to use in this manner enables learners to make their passive vocabulary active. It should be mentioned, however, that the vocabulary presented in the coursebook is by no means exhaustive, and students should be encouraged to use printed dictionaries and those available on the internet to broaden their vocabulary base. Instructors may also wish to introduce a certain amount of additional vocabulary where they feel it to be beneficial. The audio recordings of the vocabulary lists should be also used in tandem with the coursebook in order to help students to develop natural pronunciation in Persian. We have made a conscious, pedagogical decision not to use transliteration in our coursebook because, in our experience, it interferes with and ultimately delays the learner's connection with the Persian script and writing system. Likewise, short vowels are not marked so that from the beginning, students become accustomed to reading authentic Persian texts where short vowels are normally not shown.

The dialogues are based on real life settings and are intended to be used to familiarize students with the formal/literary register of Persian. Students can listen to the audio recordings of the dialogues as read by native speakers, and use them to gauge their own pronunciation. The dialogues are followed by comprehension questions in Persian which can be answered orally or in writing. Students are also invited to compose a modified version of the dialogue in their own words, which they can then act out in class in pairs. Controlled exercises of this type, on the one hand make students engage in a creative manner with the structures necessary to imitate natural style when producing Persian. On the other hand, these exercises also help students to internalize the vocabulary and structures introduced in the dialogue by requiring them to substitute the information presented in the dialogue with their own information.

As far as possible, we have endeavoured to explain the grammatical points in plain

English. These brief grammar explanations are followed immediately by relevant examples so as to build the grammatical competence of the students as well as their communicative competence. In other words, there is as smooth a transition as possible from the explicit explanation of grammatical points to their implicit presentation in context. In addition, from the first lessons, students learn not only to form simple sentences and to analyse their constituent parts, but also to construct and analyse compound and complex sentences. The verb is said to be the head of the sentence. This is why in this coursebook, simple verbs have been introduced prior to other parts of speech (such as nouns and adjectives) in each grammar section. Moreover, since the first few lessons contain simple vocabulary, the main focus for the learners at the beginning will be the acquisition of verbs, which contain the core meaning of the sentence. It should be noted that not all the example Persian sentences given in the grammar sections are accompanied by English translations. This requires learners to engage more directly with the Persian constructions and to focus on grammatical patterns, rather than being distracted by decoding the semantic meaning. Students should, of course, be encouraged to look up any new vocabulary they encounter in the exercises in the glossary at the back of the book, or else in a dictionary.

The short texts introduce learners to larger blocks of language, and show them how phrases and sentences are connected in a paragraph. The texts contain information about modern and pre-modern Iranian society, literature, history and art; we firmly believe that the language should not be separated from its cultural context in second-language instruction. The audio recording of each short text should be used as a pre-reading exercise for listening comprehension. The audio should be played twice while students keep their books closed: the first time followed by several general comprehension questions delivered orally, and the second time followed by more detailed comprehension questions. Following this, the students can be asked to open their books and first read and then paraphrase the text in small groups. In this way, heritage students and absolute beginners can be paired or else divided into mixed groups to work together to better understand and summarize the text.

The colloquial dialogues are situational, in Tehrani dialect, and are aimed at familiarizing students with conversation in everyday situations. The formal/literary versus colloquial tables after each dialogue highlight the difference between the two registers of the language, and can be used on the one hand to help *ab initio* learners to convert their formal Persian into colloquial, and, conversely, help heritage learners to familiarize themselves with the relationship between the spoken form of Persian – which they are more comfortable with – and the formal, literary register. By including this colloquial section in each lesson, we hope to encourage instruction in colloquial Persian in the classroom, which should enable those students without Persian-speaking heritage, and those who do not have the opportunity to visit Iran, to learn to converse in a natural spoken register. We have chosen to draw a clear separation between the formal/literary and colloquial in our coursebook since we feel that by doing so a more level playing field is created for both heritage learners and *ab initio* students. Heritage learners commonly

have limited knowledge of formal, written Persian, and so by focusing on this register of Persian, the learning environment becomes more homogenous.

□ Tentative syllabus

A tentative syllabus is suggested below, although it should be stressed that each class will have its own natural pace:

If introductory Persian is taught as a year-long course, with two semesters each of approximately 13 weeks, with around 40 hours of Persian instruction per semester, each lesson can be covered in two weeks (or six sessions) in the following manner:

- Class 1: Pre-lesson discussion of the title, photograph, and caption and first half of vocabulary
- Class 2: Second half of vocabulary
- Class 3: Formal dialogue and first half of the grammar
- Class 4: Reading and second half of the grammar
- Class 5: Colloquial dialogue
- Class 6: Chapter quiz

If this pattern is followed, the first seven chapters can be covered in the first semester and the second eight chapters in the second semester.

Depending on the size of the class and the students' individual learning strategies, the instructor can adopt different teaching techniques which s/he feels will best facilitate the acquisition of the material. The more the students are involved in the class, the greater the chance they will acquire and retain the material covered. Bridging between the students' existing knowledge and the new information also facilitates learning. In addition, the students' autonomy can be built up by assigning different target-language-related tasks to them, such as generating sample sentences with the newly introduced vocabulary or writing dialogues and texts similar to those presented in the book or giving short presentations on the topics covered in each lesson. Language proficiency follows when the four key language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking – are enhanced side-by-side in this kind of integrated approach.

We hope that you will enjoy using this coursebook, and look forward to receiving your feedback via email or the website.

Pouneh Shabani Jadidi and Dominic Parviz Brookshaw
Montreal and Manchester, July 2009

■ Parts of speech in Persian

noun (e.g. love, flower, kindness)	اسم
verb (e.g. goes, has arrived, will eat)	فعل
adjective (e.g. good, eager, faithful)	صفت
adverb (e.g. well, carefully, enthusiastically)	قید
preposition (e.g. on, without, by)	حرف اضافه
pronoun (e.g. it, her, themselves)	ضمیر
conjunction (e.g. and, otherwise, however)	حرف ربط
compound noun (e.g. ice cream, blackboard)	اسم مرکب
phrase (e.g. in the park, standing there, by means of)	عبارت
sentence (e.g. I study Persian.)	جمله