Persian Heritage Language Instruction in the U.S.

THE DEMOGRAPHY, PEDAGOGY, AND CHALLENGES

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Morning Agenda

- The demography of Persian heritage language learners
- What motivates Persian heritage language learners to study their heritage language?
- Instructional practices in Iran and the U.S.
- What are the cultural themes for Persian heritage language classroom?
- Modern methods of teaching a heritage language class
- Final projects
Your Background

- Who has taught a Persian class with heritage students?
- How many percent of your classes are composed of heritage speakers?
- Do you differentiate heritage vs. non-heritage speakers, and how?
- Who has taught a Persian class specifically designed for heritage language learners?
Why bother to ask?

1. To fit instruction to the class
2. To respond to the need of all learners

So we can:
1. Assess the level of the class (where is the baseline: novice, intermediate, or advanced learners)
2. Group students differentially based on their existing knowledge
Who are Persian heritage language learners (PHLLs)?

Make groups and discuss one of the following questions and present it to the class (5 min. discussion, 3 min presentation, and 2 min. Q & C)

Demographics and spectrum

1) What are the heritages/ethnicities/religions/dialects of Persian-speaking students?
2) Why PHLLs want to study their heritage language and where can they go to study it?
3) Who are the Persian heritage teachers and how (can) they get their contents?
4) What are the age-specific instructions practices/interests among PHLLs (both in terms of skills and cultural interest)?
In the following video, some of the PHLLs talk about their motivation to study their heritage language. Make notes and say in your own words what drives these students to pursue their heritage language.

Motivation video
Learning in Iran

“Learning in Iran is learning by rote. In school, children have to learn long lessons from their schoolbooks, verbatim. The ‘best’ students are those with the best and fastest memory. In the recitation of lessons, poems, or even mathematical problems, the slightest deviation from the given text (the ‘truth’) is chalked up as a mistake. One is not allowed to put the meaning of a piece into one's own words. Strong competition from the other children will silence a speaker who hesitates or makes a mistake, even if the teacher is willing to allow time for recollection.”

*Anthropologist, Ericka Fridl (2004)*
Learning in Iran

The culture of teaching and learning

1) Real learning is painful vs. learning should be fun
2) Hierarchy of knowledge (who knows?)
3) The relationship between learner and teacher
   a) Affect and teaching Persian
      (video 1)
      (video 2)
   b) Socialization into and through heritage language
      (video)
Culture

- What are the cultural themes of Persian speaking countries?
  1) What should be the themes in learning Persian?
     a) Poetry, khoshnevisi, orality (Naghali)
     b) What do these have in common? Why?
  2) What our heritage students are really interested to know about their heritage culture?
     a) Classical vs. contemporary literature (Rumi vs. Shamloo)
     b) Content differences: Shahnameh stories vs. grandmother’s stories
     c) Home and street culture, idioms
     d) How deep or shallow culture should be taught?

- “I understand what taroof is, but I don’t understand why people do it?”
Culture in practice

- Form groups of 4 or 5 and discuss what cultural topics (more specific, e.g., Chaharshanbeh soori) can be used in a Persian heritage language classroom?
- Search the internet for authentic materials (videos, photos, discussion forums, etc.)
- What made you pick this topic?
- Is the topic inclusive or exclusive (should we pick a inclusive topic that covers everyone, or many exclusive topics)?
Approaches to teach Persian heritage language

- Initial proficiencies
  - Self-assessments
  - OPI
  - Read and write tests

- Motivations
  - Collecting info about Ss interest in learning HL

- Language-specific: ‘Swiss cheese holes’
  - What are the needs?
Differentiated Instruction

- Each learner is unique (different background, skills, learning style, interest, etc.)
- Student uniqueness is more pronounced in a heritage language classroom:
  - Ss have broader age range (cognitive/learning differences)
  - Wider skill differences in the target language (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
  - Varied interests in learning specific skills (communication vs. literacy vs. cultural interest)
- Goal: Adjusting curriculum according to Ss instead of expecting Ss to modify themselves for curriculum
- Challenges: more planning, pre-assessments
Differentiated Instruction

- Differentiated instruction
  - Content: authentic materials
  - Process: top-down, same content but different activities
  - Products: role-plays, YouTube production, differentiated tests

- Steps:
  - Pre-assessments
  - Grouping strategies
    a) Same or mix ability
    b) Interest
    c) Learning style
    d) Students’ choice
Top-Down Instruction

- **Top-down instruction**
  - Project-based (doing something with the language, YouTube productions, birthday card invitation, etc.)
  - Literacy-based (what heritage language learners need most)
  - Task-based (meaningful tasks, e.g., buying grocery in a market, visiting a dentist, etc.)

- What are Persian heritage language-specific projects and tasks?
Sample Activity 1 for DI

- Ss are instructed to form groups and find information about Norouz (Iranian new year) and create a poster
  - Borrow laptop from library and do internet search, etc.
  - Teacher provide Ss with authentic materials about Norouz (magazine, newspapers, TV programs, family talks)
  - Mixed-group ability: Some Ss read Persian materials for others, some discuss (speak) what is needed for celebration, some write skits, and everyone present part of the poster for the class
Sample Activity 2 for DI

- **Weatherman role play**
  - Find a video clip (internet, satellite, etc.) of a weather report and focus on a specific city (listening activity)
  - Teacher distributes a weather map from an Iranian newspaper and asks Ss to figure out all climate info about that city (reading activity)
  - Teacher evaluates Ss progress and put them into diff groups
  - Advanced Ss role play weatherman for that city
  - Intermediate Ss tell how to pack cloths for a trip to that city
  - Beginners create a poster with weather-related items (cut-out words from magazine, photos, etc.)
Final project

Using the authentic materials to teach Persian or by browsing internet sites, form groups of 4 and discuss (10 min.) the following and then present (4 min.) your findings to the class.

1. What is the source of this material? Was it designed to teach Persian heritage language learners? Can it be used in a heritage language classroom? Why and why not?
2. What is the emphasis (LSRWG)?
3. How would you use/modify these contents to implement differentiated instruction?
4. How can you add/implement technology teaching these contents (audio-video, can-do, YouTube, Wimba, Google Doc, etc.)
5. Do you see any evidence of implementation of national standards? If yes, which and how? If not, which ones are missing and how would you change it to implement the national standards (pay specific attention to “culture”)?
Homework

Make a small lesson plan (one hour) specifically designed for PHLLs. Your task is to effectively implement the following in your lesson.

1. 3 modes of communication
2. Differentiated instruction
3. Top-down curricula approach