The American Association of Teachers of Persian

https://www.aatpersian.org   contact@aatpersian.org

FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

A Note from the President

Dear Colleagues,

I began my tenure as AATP President in February 2025 to strengthen our association and foster closer cooperation among our members. Over the past year, my primary focus has been on improving our website and enhancing our social media presence. For a detailed report on our activities throughout 2025, including website updates, elections, bylaws amendment simplification, and a review of financial records, please see page 11 of this newsletter. This issue also includes details about our roundtable and two social events at the MESA 2025 conference, which benefited from strong attendance and active engagement. In addition, a panel proposal has been submitted for the AIS 2026 conference in Utrecht, Netherlands. I kindly ask for your continued support by encouraging your institutions to become members and by inviting colleagues to join our association. Expanding our membership will allow us to offer more professional development opportunities and to create richer resources for our community. Please feel free to share your comments, proposals, questions and suggestions as we move forward together to advance the goals of our association.

Sincerely,

Peyman Nojoumian
AATP President, 2025 to 2027
University of Southern California, Los Angeles

AATP's New Executive Board Members

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

Behzad Borhan, Executive Secretary

Behzad Borhan is a Course Lecturer in Persian language at McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies. He earned his first Ph.D. in Persian Language and Literature from the University of Tehran in 2020, where he also taught Persian literature, and is currently pursuing a second Ph.D. in Islamic Studies at McGill. From 2017 to 2019, he served as a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University. His interdisciplinary research focuses on Persian and Arabic mystical literature and Sufism, with particular emphasis on the concept of *karāmat* (miracle). His forthcoming monograph, *Among Our Shaykh's Karāmāt*, examines miracle narratives within the broader context of Persian mystical traditions. He is also the author of the award-winning annotated edition of Rumi's *Mathnawi*, *Laṭāyif al-Ma'nawī* (2017), which received the distinction of Best Student Book of the Year in Iran. In addition to his research, Behzad has extensive experience teaching Persian language and literature in different academic settings, where he has sought to integrate cultural, literary, and artistic dimensions into his pedagogy. He has a long-lasting connection to Persian traditional music, having practiced both vocal and instrumental forms. Behzad's research has been published in respected journals, including *Iranian Studies* and the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*.
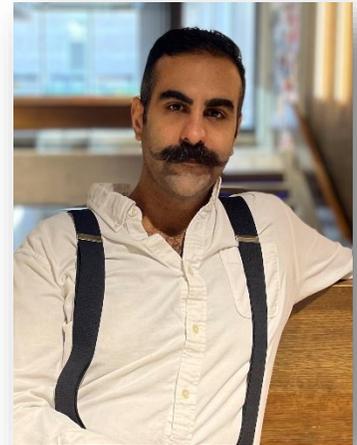
Azita Hojatollah Taleghani, Executive Officer

Azita Hojatollah Taleghani is an Associate Professor, Teaching Stream, in Persian language, literature, and linguistics at the University of Toronto. She earned a PhD in linguistics from the Department of Linguistics at the University of Arizona in 2006. Her research has primarily focused on the pedagogy of second-language learners and heritage speakers, linguistic approaches in modern Persian literature, Persian syntax and morphology, as well as web-based and online language teaching. She is an editorial board member of the Encyclopedia *Iranica Women Poets* and was the Program Coordinator and Director of Less Commonly Taught Languages at the University of Toronto Mississauga from 2009 to 2023. She was the Director of the Language Hub Project at this University from 2008 to 2012, and an executive member of the University of Toronto Faculty Association from 2018 to 2020. She published a monograph on *Modality, Aspect, and Negation in Persian* in 2008. She has published several Book Chapters, "*Mood and Modality in Persian*", in the Iranian Aspects of Linguistics, Cambridge

Scholars Press, 2008, *"Negative Forms of Persian Progressive Tense: Evidence from Monolingual, Second Language Learners, and Heritage Speakers* in Handbook of Persian Second Language Acquisition and Pedagogy of Persian, Routledge, 2020, *"Acquisition of Persian Differential Object Marker 'Râ': A Challenge for the Second-language learners and Heritage Speakers"* in the Routledge Book Series (forthcoming), and *"Teaching Persian Grammar through Literature: Bringing Language to Life in Persian Second Language Classrooms"* in Literature in Persian Second Language Pedagogy, Brill (forthcoming). She is working on a textbook on the *"Grammar of Persian Verbs for Persian Second-Language and Heritage Learners"* and co-editing a volume on *Persian Second Language Pedagogy: New Trends and Innovations*. She has also published several refereed articles, most recently, Archaism as an Aesthetic Technique and Linguistics Process (2020) and "Foregrounding and Its Role in Persian Modern Poetry (2016).

Jaleh Pirnazar, Executive Officer

Jaleh Pirnazar was Senior Lecturer in Iranian Studies, Persian Language Coordinator, and Senior Research Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, where she taught from 1970 to 2020. She received her Ph.D. in Middle Eastern Studies and Persian Literature from this same institution in 1984. Dr. Pirnazar taught elementary and intermediate-level Persian language courses to both heritage and nonheritage students, as well as classes on Modern Persian Literature, Classical Persian Literature, and Iranian Film and Fiction. Dr. Pirnazar has published on Persian language pedagogy, Persian literature, the Iranian Jewish community, and Iranian cinema in a variety of academic journals and edited volumes, such as: "The Literary Review," "Iran Nameh," and "Film and Society."

AATP Roundtable at MESA 2025 Conference

AATP organized a roundtable at MESA 2025 Conference in Washington DC. The roundtable titled **Increasing Student Engagement and Motivation in Persian Classrooms,** received submissions from Persian teachers and AATP members. Following a blind review process, six presentations were selected. The event was recorded and made available to members online via Zoom.

The following reports are based on the abstracts of the presentations. To view the roundtable video, please log in to the AATP website at https://www.aatpersian.org and visit the "Webinars & Videos" tab. Access to this tab is limited to AATP members.

AATP Roundtable at the MESA 2025 Conference (Meeting in Conjunction)
Saturday, November 22, 2025, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
Westin Downtown, Washington DC
Room: Magnolia B

Organized by: Peyman Nojoumian
Chair: Farima Sadigh-Mostowfi

1. **What Innovative Technology Can Increase Engagement and Motivation in Language Learners?**
   Peyman Nojoumian, University of Southern California

Recent advances in artificial intelligence, particularly large language models (LLMs), have created new opportunities for increasing learner engagement and motivation in language education. This presentation examined how innovative technologies grounded in LLMs could be meaningfully integrated into language teaching without sacrificing sound pedagogy or human-centered learning. Rather than treating AI as a novelty, the talk emphasized pedagogical purpose, learning impact, and proficiency-appropriate design. Drawing on task-based language teaching and ACTFL proficiency guidelines, the presentation demonstrated how LLMs can support a wide range of instructional tasks, including vocabulary practice, grammar tutoring, dialogue generation, feedback on learner output, and scaffolded speaking practice. Special attention was given to adjusting AI output to learners' proficiency levels through careful prompting and customized platforms such as OpenAI Explore GPTs. The presentation situated AI use within a three-phase model of human learning, highlighting the importance of productive struggle and partial control to avoid overreliance on automated responses. While AI can provide flexible, immediate, and highly interactive practice, the presentation argued that human instructors remain essential for fostering trust, interpersonal communication, and meaningful learning experiences. The talk concluded by proposing a balanced framework in which AI enhances motivation and engagement while preserving the central role of the teacher in language learning.

2. Engaging Persian Second Language Learners Through the Dynamic Mediums of Literature, Film, Music, Role-play, and Social Media

Azita H. Taleghani, University of Toronto

Language learning had evolved beyond traditional methods in an increasingly interconnected world, necessitating dynamic and adaptable approaches that foster student engagement and interaction. This presentation explored innovative strategies for integrating literature, movies, songs, role-play, and social media into Persian second-language classrooms. It showed how we could create immersive environments that mirror authentic cultural contexts by leveraging diverse multimedia resources. Literature, for instance, hones reading skills and delves into complex themes and characters, fostering critical thinking and empathy. Similarly, film and music are compelling tools that strengthen listening skills and cultural awareness, enabling students to experience language in vibrant, meaningful ways. Role-play activities empower students to communicate authentically and gain confidence in real-life conversations. Integrating social media platforms, such as blogs, podcasts, and Twitter, is a powerful way to encourage students to engage in real-world language use. These platforms promote collaboration and communication beyond the classroom, inviting learners to share their thoughts, interact with global peers, and participate in discussions. Ultimately, they help build a vibrant language community. Through practical examples, this presentation discussed how Persian educators could create a more engaging and interactive language learning environment and how to employ the power of storytelling, audiovisual media, role-play, and technology to create authentic interactions that genuinely resonate with learners. We can develop motivated, communicative, and culturally aware Persian second language learners by addressing the multifaceted nature of language learning and leveraging modern resources.

3. Using the Project Approach and Collaborative Reading to Enhance Student Engagement and Motivation in Persian Classrooms
Pouneh Shabani Jadidi, University of Chicago

This presentation discussed the project approach and the use of social media/social annotation tool. In the project approach to teaching, the students explore a topic by investigating, researching, writing, and presenting their findings. Examples of several projects were demonstrated through which instructors could lead students to become more motivated, more engaged, and more independent learners.

This kind of approach can be used at all language proficiency levels. For the elementary and intermediate levels, students can explore Persian stores, Persian movies shown in the theater, Persian restaurants, etc. They can do interviews with the Persian speaking people, write down their findings, and post a video about their research and their findings in the private social media group used by the class for this purpose. at the advanced and superior levels, students can do research in the rare books section of their university library, or at the archive of the Persian sources, or in the ancient Iran section of the local museum. For examples, they can explore different kinds of calligraphy used in Persian manuscripts, or different editions of the same primary source. As the students carry out their research, they post their findings throughout the term on the platform to which only the instructors and their peers have access. In addition, a social annotation tool is used to engage the students more deeply with their projects through a collaborative discovery of the text. This way, everyone is engaged not only in their own projects but also those of their peers.

4. Enhancing Motivation and Engagement in an Online Persian Language Course
Neda Sahranavard, University of California, Irvine

Fostering students' motivation for language learning is crucial, particularly as enrollment in foreign language programs at colleges declines (Gao, 2024). Research on language learning motivation has largely focused on English, often overlooking learners of other languages (Duff, 2017). Moreover, in online language courses, less-advanced students frequently struggle to fully and equitably participate in group projects (Evans, 2009; Hennebry-Leung & Gao, 2022).
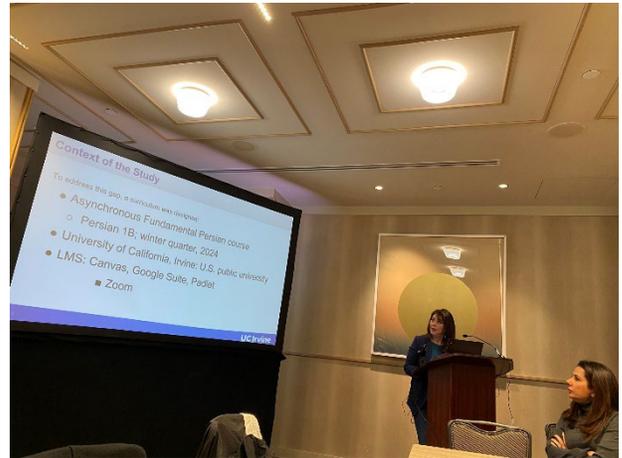
To address this gap, a curriculum was designed for an asynchronous Persian course at a large U.S. public university to explore how integrating translanguaging techniques and multimodal resources can support learners' motivation and enhance their engagement in group projects.

Recognizing that motivation is dynamic and shaped by interaction (McGroarty, 1998; Ushioda, 2009), the curriculum incorporated personalized, inquiry-based assignments, peer collaboration, and digital tools. Additionally, it utilized translanguaging strategies and culturally relevant (Folse, 2004; Krashen, 2020) multimodal resources (Canagarajah, 2006; Matsuda, 2006; Amicucci, 2012), emphasizing student agency (Kubota, 2009; Canagarajah, 2013). The use of multimodal resources fostered students' digital literacy and linguistic diversity, allowing them to express their multicultural identities.

Analysis of assignments and student responses revealed that this approach significantly enhanced students' motivation to learn Persian. Student reflections indicated increased engagement and a stronger sense of belonging in the online learning environment, while collaborative projects deepened their language proficiency and Persian cultural awareness. This study highlighted the importance of digitally and culturally inclusive group projects in fostering motivation and building a learning community. The presentation showcased course design, sample assignments, and student responses to illustrate this approach's effectiveness.

5. Interactive Vocabulary Building: Using Word Wall to Boost Engagement in Persian Classrooms

Banafsheh Pourzangi, University of California, Los Angeles

This presentation introduced Word Wall, an online platform designed to create interactive, student-centered language activities that could be tailored for different proficiency levels. Drawing from her experience teaching Persian to heritage and non-heritage learners, the presenter demonstrated how using this tool helped increase student engagement, vocabulary retention, and motivation.

The presenter showcased examples of personalized games and exercises—such as matching games, word hunts, sentence scrambles, and timed quizzes—that invite students to play with language while reinforcing core vocabulary and grammar structures. These activities can be used both synchronously and asynchronously, making them especially valuable for hybrid or online learning environments.

In addition to demonstrating how the platform works, the presenter briefly shared student feedback and classroom results that highlighted increased participation and enthusiasm when using Word Wall regularly. Attendees left with practical ideas and inspiration for creating their own interactive exercises tailored to Persian language instruction.

This presentation aimed to offer a simple but effective way to energize the classroom and support active learning in Persian programs across different levels.

6. Engaging with Persian Culture in the Virtual Classroom: A Discussion-Based Approach
Zohreh Mirsharif, Georgetown University

This presentation showcased the presenter's experience with implementing a monthly Persian culture discussion post assignment in Persian language courses.

Students contributed a post on a topic of their choice, such as music, food, film, or poetry, related to Persian-speaking countries. They also engaged with their peers' posts by submitting meaningful comments. This approach aimed to foster students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and language skills in a virtual learning environment.

Through this assignment, students developed a deeper understanding of Persian culture, its diversity, and its relevance to contemporary society. The online discussion platform encouraged students to share their perspectives, ask questions, and learn from one another. The presenter discussed the benefits and challenges of this approach, shared examples of student posts and comments, and provided suggestions for instructors looking to integrate similar assignments into their own courses.

By exploring the effectiveness of this approach, we could better understand how to promote cultural engagement and language learning in online environments.

7. Enhancing Persian Language Acquisition Through Strategically Structured Role-Play Activities

Mina Raminsabet, University of Oklahoma

Grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Communicative Language Teaching principles, this presentation introduced a systematic approach to role-play activities in Persian language classrooms. Research demonstrates that role-play promotes authentic language use by creating meaningful contexts for communication (Kodotchigova, 2002; Ladousse, 1987). The methodology leveraged Social Learning Theory through strategic student pairing, where learners benefited from peer scaffolding and collaborative knowledge construction.

The approach centered on three structured presentations per semester, with strategic pairing as its cornerstone. Students were matched based on complementary abilities, creating supportive environments where partners could thrive without language anxiety—a critical factor in second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Heritage learners paired together accessed advanced discourse opportunities, while mixed-level pairs facilitated peer teaching, consistent with collaborative learning frameworks.

Students received one week to prepare five-minute dialogues, encouraging autonomous learning and creative language application. For example, in a Novice High/Intermediate Low implementation, scenarios progressed as follows: first, a first-date scenario in which students practiced personal information exchange, discussing hobbies, origins, and studies while incorporating authentic reactions in Persian (e.g., "چه جالب!/How interesting!" "چه بد، اوای/Oh no, that's bad!" "من هم همینطور/Me too!"). Second, a shopping scenario involved two customers interacting with a vendor, practicing bargaining, complimenting clothing choices, and describing gift preferences for a third person. Finally, direction-giving and cooking instruction scenarios targeted command verb forms in practical contexts, allowing students to master imperative forms through meaningful interaction.

This structured progression aligned with task-based language teaching principles, moving from form-focused to meaning-focused activities. Students received one-week preparation periods, encouraging autonomous learning and creative application. Assessment data demonstrated improved confidence, grammatical accuracy, and communicative competence. The presentation provided theoretical frameworks, implementation strategies, and assessment tools for adapting this evidence-based approach across proficiency levels.

AATP Annual Business Meeting and Social Luncheon at MESA 2025

The AATP annual business meeting was held at the MESA 2025 Conference immediately following the roundtable and its Q&A session. Below is a brief report on the AATP 2025 annual business meeting and the activities undertaken throughout 2025.

Saturday, November 22, 2025,
12:00-03:00 PM, Washington, DC.

The meeting began with a report by the AATP president. Dr. Nojoumian and Banafsheh Pourzangi began their tenure in February 2025 and will continue through December 2026. **Dr. Latifeh Hagigi**'s four-year tenure as AATP Executive Officer and **Dr. Sahba Shayani**'s three-year tenure as AATP Executive Secretary concluded on December 31, 2025. The AATP Executive Board would like to extend its sincere gratitude to Dr. Latifeh Hagigi and Dr. Sahba Shayani for their great contributions to the AATP community and wishes them the best in their future endeavors.

The AATP ran an election and welcomed two new Executive Officers, Dr. Azita Taleghani and Dr. Jaleh Pirnazar as well as a new Executive Secretary, Dr. Behzad Borhan. The new officers began their tenure on January 1, 2026. A full report on website updates was presented, including the main menu overhaul, new cookie and privacy policy settings, enhanced security and stability measures, updated member subscription information, and an expanded photo gallery and awards pages. The Next report item was on the Bylaw's article 4.4 amendment. This amendment was simplified by the ad-hoc committee: Drs. Nahal Akbari, Anousha Sedighi, and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi. Banafsheh Pourzangi reported on new institutional memberships, totaling ten to date. Currently, AATP has 36 paying members out of 100 registered site members. Access to AATP member-area materials is limited to paying members. She also reported on our current budget balance, which stands at $5,723 as of this report.

The meeting also addressed other financial matters, including the renewal of the association's status as a nonprofit private organization in Washington, DC. The final agenda item focused on AATP's panel proposal and three paper submissions for the Association of Iranian Studies 2026 Conference in Utrecht, Netherlands. The AATP Award ceremony was scheduled to take place during the AIS 2026 Conference. The meeting concluded with a social luncheon event and adjourned at 3:00 PM.

AATP Co-sponsored Networking Brunch – Washington, DC

The AATP co-sponsored a networking brunch, hosted by University of Maryland Persian Flagship Program and the Georgetown University Persian Studies Program for Persian language instructors. The event took place at Busboys & Poets on Sunday, November 23, 2025, during the MESA 2025 Conference.
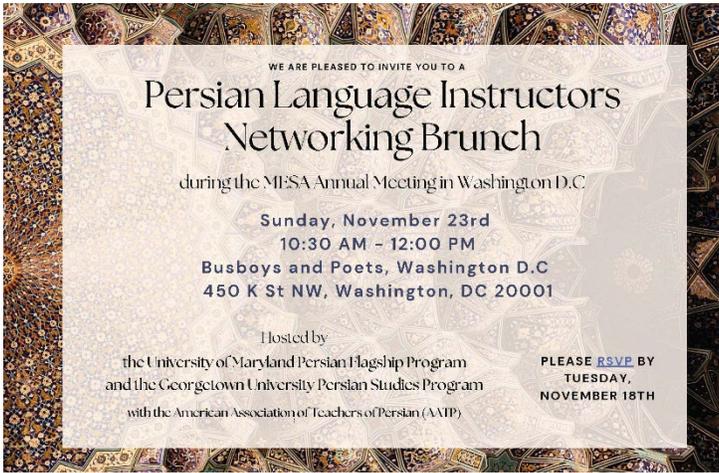
Persian instructors from the Washington, DC community, along with AATP members, gathered for the networking event and exchanged experiences on Persian pedagogy, instructional resources and future plans. Dr. Nahal Akbari, AATP Ex-Officio and Director of the UMD Persian Flagship Program introduced the Master of Professional Studies in Persian (MPS), a Boren Awards program open to graduates of any institution. The program will begin in Fall 2026 at the UMD with funding available through the Boren Fellowship. For more information visit: https://sllc.umd.edu/fields/persian/graduate/mps

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:

- **Indiana University Bloomington**

- **University of Chicago, Persian Language Program**

- **University of Maryland, Roshan Institute for Persian Studies**

- **Georgetown University, Department of Persian Studies**

- **University of Pennsylvania, Persian Language Program**

- **University of California, Irvine, Jordan Center for Persian Studies**

- **University of Southern California, Department of Middle East Studies**

- **University of California, Los Angeles, Program of Iranian Studies**

- **University of Arizona, Persian Language Program**

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

If your institution is not already an 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 plays an active and engaging role in the community of Persian language teachers. Please consider joining AATP as an institutional member today.

Publications

Akbari, N. 2026. Teaching Persian as an Additional Language in Plural Societies. Toward Critically Engaged Practices in the Classroom. In Azita Hojatollah Taleghani & Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi (Eds.), *Persian Language Pedagogy: New trends and Innovations* (pp. 56-71). New York: Routledge.

Hojatollah Taleghani, Azita. 2026. *Acquisition of Persian Differential Object Marker 'Rā': A Challenge for the Second Language Learners and Heritage Speakers*. In Persian Language Pedagogy: New Trends and Innovations, edited by Hojatollah Taleghani, Azita and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi. London and New York: Routledge.

Hojatollah Taleghani, Azita and Shabani-Jadidi, Pouneh. 2026. *Persian Language Pedagogy: New Trends and Innovations*. London and New York: Routledge.

Nojoumian, Peyman. 2026. "Innovative Technology in Language Classroom: Using Virtual Reality in Task-based Language Teaching", in *Persian Language Pedagogy: New Trends and Innovations*, edited by Hojatollah Taleghani, Azita, and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi. London: Routledge.

Shabani-Jadidi, Pouneh. 2026. "ABC or BCA: What to Teach First: A Psycholinguistic Approach to Teaching Persian as a Second Language" in *Persian Language Pedagogy: New Trends and Innovations,* edited by Azita Taleghani and Pouneh Shabani-Jadidi, London and New York: Routledge.

Nojoumian, Peyman. 2025. "Passage Selection for the Development of Persian Listening and Reading Assessment Materials". In: Saeli, H. (eds) *Handbook of Teaching and Learning Persian as a Second Language*. *Springer Handbooks in Languages and Linguistics*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-1818-4_19-1

News

- Webinar Series organized by Pouneh Shabani Jadidi and Azita H. Taleghani: Literature in Persian Language Pedagogy, Jan 2024-Dec 2025.

- Two new courses developed and taught in summer 2026 by Pouneh Shabani Jadidi
  Persian Foundational Reading
  Persian Reading for Research

- Congratulations to Dr. Peyman Nojoumian, University of Southern California on receiving the 2025 Dornsife Excellence in Language Teaching Award.