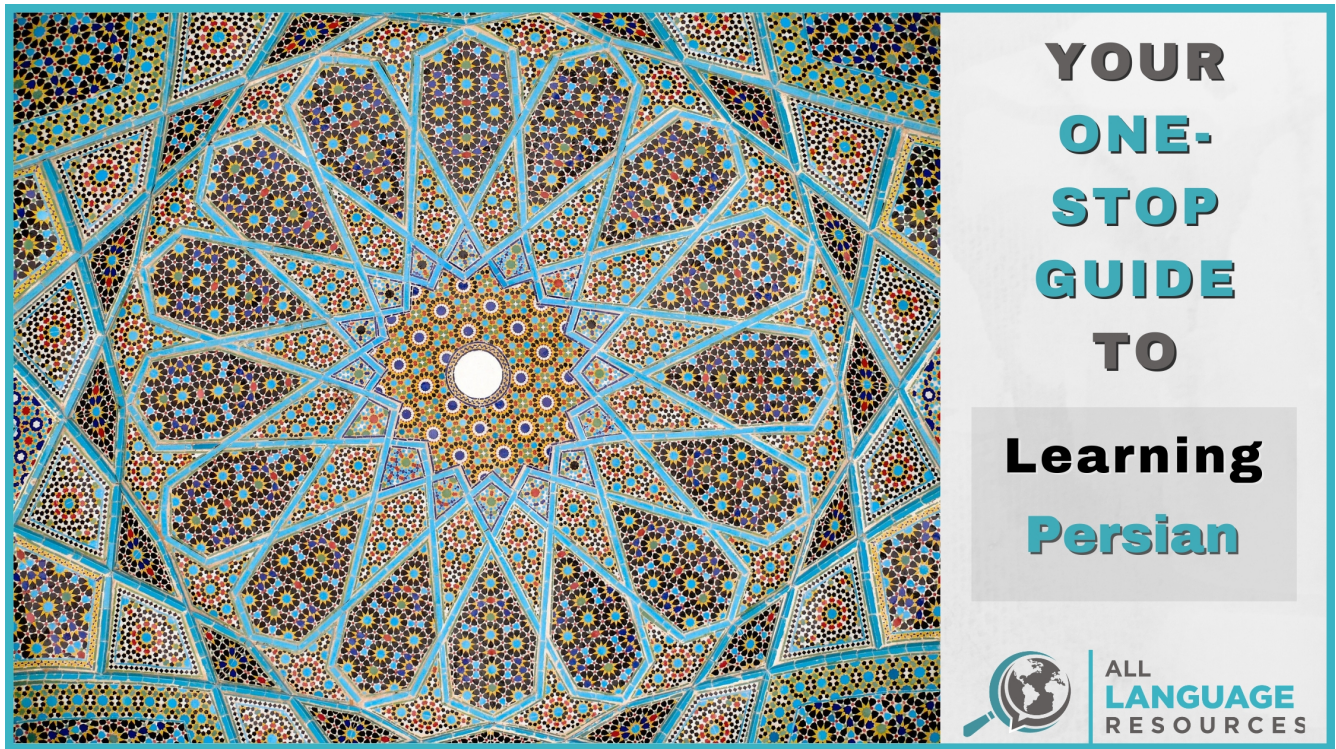




Your One-Stop Guide to Learning Persian

by Michelle Baumgartner

About the Persian Language

Rising up from the Persian Plateau over two dozen centuries ago, the Persian language still expresses the thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams of over seventy million native speakers in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.

Modern Persian is an [Indo-Iranian language](#) that traces its roots all the way back to Old Persian, the language used by the [Achaemenid Empire under Cyrus the Great](#) (550-330 BC). Its writings date as far back as classical Greek and Latin literature.

Persian has long been a language of literature and culture throughout Central, Western, and South Asia, as a result of Persian influences in those areas.

Like Chinese, Persian is considered a **macrolanguage**, meaning that it encompasses a group of closely related languages. Unlike the Chinese macrolanguage, the individual languages comprising Persian are somewhat mutually intelligible — although there are some differences in [pronunciation and vocabulary](#). The main division in the Persian macrolanguage is between Western and Eastern Persian.

Persian is an official language in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. These are also the three countries where it's primarily spoken. Throughout the globe, there are major populations of Persian speakers in cosmopolitan cities such as Los Angeles (and its "[Tehrangelles](#)" community) and London.



Persian media store in "Little Persia" / "Tehrangelles," Westwood Boulevard, Los Angeles (Image Credit: Arspickles17, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

In Iran, Persian is called Farsi — a word which derives from the same root as "[Persia,](#)" an older name [for Iran](#). A little over half of the Iranian population speaks Farsi as a native language, many of them using the Tehrani dialect that differs somewhat from literary standard Persian. (The other half of the population speaks Azerbaijani, Kurdish, and a handful of other recognized regional languages, such as Arabic and Balochi.) Farsi is considered Western Persian. Many Persian speakers across the world call their language Farsi, even if they (or their ancestors) don't come from Iran.

The three main Afghan Persian dialects are Dari, Aimaqi (named for the [Aimaq people](#)), and Hazagari (the language of the [Hazara people](#)). The proper name of the Persian standard used in Afghanistan has been a [matter of some debate](#). Persian — called "Dari" by the government — serves as one of Afghanistan's two official languages, with the other being [Pashto](#). However, some speakers refer to their language as Fārsī-ye Darī, or simply Farsi. And this is understandable, as Dari and Farsi are [similar to each other](#) in many ways.



Friendship Bridge spanning the Panj River between Afghanistan and Tajikistan (Image Credit: Khwahan, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons)

In Tajikistan, Persian is called тоҷикӣ (Tajiki) or Tajik (sometimes spelled “Tadzhik”). The language intermixes Russian and Uzbek loanwords with its Southwestern Iranian roots. It’s also retained many archaic Persian words, similarly to how [Acadian French](#) still uses words now obsolete in Metropolitan French. Tajiki has about eight million speakers worldwide — along with its own body of literature, which developed independently of the more mainstream Persian traditions. The Tajiki variety of Persian is also spoken by a small group in neighboring Uzbekistan — about 5% of the population, although some sources state this may be as high as 30%.

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