

Languages in and around Afghanistan
Pedagogical Materials Group
Notes from 12th and 13th December, 2004
Philadelphia
Compiled by Dr. Steven M. Poulos

The *Pedagogical Materials Group* met concurrently with the *Resources on Language Policy Group*. Two formal presentations were delivered to both groups (see Rzehak and Tatman/Boureston on the list of "Presentations and Reports")

Goals

The session began with a discussion of projected goals. As a "first ever" workshop on this subject in the United States these were what we aimed at for discussion and not necessarily what we achieved or even hoped to achieve by the end of the session.

Afghan studies in the United States.

What Afghan languages are currently studied and what is a minimum in this country for the further appropriate development of Afghan studies?

Can we afford it?

SALRC.

What support can and should the South Asia Language Resource Center give to Afghan language projects in the U.S.?

This session will concentrate on materials as a first step in undertaking future projects:

What is available? What do we need? What should we develop?

Statement on the languages of Afghanistan.

A statement on the languages of Afghanistan and their relationship to each other was seen as useful to the field as well as to non-academic agencies. This statement could be used to explain program models.

Language pedagogy specific issues.

How does the multilingual and diglossic situation of Afghanistan affect language policy, planning and teaching?

How to use passive skills to facilitate acquisition of a new language with languages which are very similar to one another?

The "usefulness" of languages. How can we satisfy both academic and non-academic subject matter needs in the teaching of Afghan languages?

Presentations

The *Pedagogical Materials Group* did not follow the format of formal presentations (with one or two exceptions). These informal notes by our recorder, Tamara Warhol, are thus a distillation of the substantial discussions that took place at these sessions.

Nuristani

Nuristani is totally insignificant in the bigger picture (approximately 100,000-300,000 speakers), but very interesting for linguistics and for natives. Few scholars work on Nuristani – only aware of 2 linguists in USA and 2 in Europe.

Richard Strand has developed an outstanding website on Nuristan and Nuristani including a bibliography. The website presents the languages of the region in schematic form and includes some small and remote Afghan languages that this workshop was not able to take up:

<http://users.sedona.net/~strand/>

There is no script for Nuristani and the general population does not write Nuristani. Some scripts have been created by scholars but there is no consensus in this area.

Most Nuristani speakers are bilingual in Dari or Pashto.

Jan Mohammed is a native speaker and has worked on the language. He also worked on the new draft constitution for Afghanistan

http://www.constitution-afg.com/draft_const.htm

Pashto and Dari are the official languages but five other languages are specifically mentioned (Article 16) and the state is enjoined to strengthen all languages of the nation. Media are encouraged in all languages. National anthem in Pashto (Article 20). Education is the right for all people at elementary and intermediate levels (Article 43) and the state must “provide the opportunity to teach native languages in the areas where they are spoken.”

Though the constitution makes these commitments, how feasible is this? Doesn't look like it will be possible. Previous governments tried and failed. For example, at present there are no schools in Nuristan. Strand has done a lot of work on grammar and vocabulary – perhaps can be made available here and in Nuristan. Some Nuristanis prefer to learn English instead of their native language.

Pashto

The majority of Pashto speakers also speak Dari. In contrast, Dari speakers seldom speak Pashto as a second language.

[Note: There was an inconclusive discussion at this point about the “national” language of Afghanistan during the 20th century: Was there ever one? Did the communists alter the situation? etc.]

At present the textbook being used for the NGO community and other foreigners in Afghanistan is Olson & Rashid, Speaking Afghan Pashto

A serious problem with this text is that it is not based on spoken language but on the written language. There is a substantial diglossic situation between the oral and written language in a major part of the Pashto region.

We were led here to a discussion of what is the goal of language teaching? The people who need it most are US and ISAF troops and NGO workers. Few speak Pashto at all. They use translators which can and has led to problems.

The Center for Applied Linguistics has been creating series of materials for academic purposes but no one was certain about how good the materials are. However, they are readily available. The materials represent a specific dialect of Pashto in Afghanistan and they end at the intermediate level. Wilma Heston has created materials for the advanced level.

The Defense Language Institute program was described by Masako Boureston. At DLI the program includes classroom work of 6hrs/day, 5 days/week, 47 weeks. Approximately 10 students/course. All students are soldiers. They need to teach listening, speaking, reading and writing. DLI is heavily invested in technology. DLI uses 3 native speakers from different regions of Afghanistan. All are bilingual in Dari and Pashto. On which dialect should the Defense Language Institute concentrate? DLI was briefly contrasted with the Fort Bragg program for Special Forces which uses outside contractors for more intensive work. Taught Pashto in 1980s and then it was discontinued. Reinstated Pashto after 9/11. DLI produces its own materials in Pashto but suffers

from a good dictionary and feels that its textbooks are not as good as they would like. Problem of time and limited funding to develop course materials. DLI also has a survival pack that is given to soldiers

Heston has done a considerable amount of work on dictionary development which will be soon be up on the web with phonological links.

Dialect of Kandahar should be the standard.

Foreign Service Institute currently has no students, but 3 instructors. Developing a basic, on-line course in Pashto. So far a two-week course with audio-cassettes and CDs with basic words and phrases being expanded this year.

Tajik Shugni, Wakhi

For Tajik, orthography is a major issue. It was written in Cyrillic until independence and recently the government has announced its intention to revert to Perso-Arabic script. This should not be a problem because it is similar to standard literary Persian.

Spoken Tajik is spread out over Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan, Tajik is being actively suppressed (probably in reaction to Islamic extremism) and the border is closed between the two countries.

In Tajikistan, the government is emphasizing Tajik over Russian. There has been a large Russian exodus. Elementary education is now in Tajik instead of Russian. However there is a lack of instructional materials in Tajik and no money to develop materials. Best Tajik course is by Lutz Rzehak in German. Beeman thought the translation of this textbook should be the priority activity for work in Tajik.

Foreign Service Institute has a full, basic Tajik course. They currently have 3 students.

Within Tajikistan perhaps 25% of the population speaks another language as their mother tongue. Most speak Uzbek; some speak languages of smaller speech communities.

Shugni and Wakhi speakers in Afghanistan are bilingual. Many speak Tajik. Knowledge of Tajik and Persian has created a diglossic situation for these speakers. Wakhi is becoming quite divergent in the various countries in which it is spoken including the Afghan "panhandle" (Wakhan corridor). It is undergoing a revival in Pakistan and perhaps in Tajikistan. John Mock's dissertation on Wakhi is a helpful reference.

Brahui

Materials: no readers; no prepared courses. Reference grammars do exist. The Pakistan language group meeting in Philadelphia in early 2003 did not give the development of a Brahui course a high priority.

Balochi

There are 100,000 Balochi speakers in Afghanistan of whom approximately 70,000 live in the southwest part of the country. Others live in northern and western provinces. However, the figures must have changed during the armed conflicts of the 1990s. Some have migrated to Iran because of armed conflict and drought. However in contrast, many Balochi speakers have migrated into Afghanistan from Pakistan.

Bashir noted that in Pakistan efforts to provide mother tongue schooling in Balochi failed because parents preferred students to learn Urdu for greater economic opportunities.

Bashir believes that there are adequate materials, including dictionaries for Baluchi. University of Chicago is going to put a dictionary up on the web. The Barker course will do as an introductory course. What are lacking are audio tapes and intermediate level texts. Perhaps some reading materials.

Lutz Rzehak gave a formal presentation, "Balochi in Afghanistan and Language Planning for the so-called National Languages in the 1980's."

There are 6 dialects of Baluchi however the Southern Balochi speakers are ethnically homogeneous.

Rzehak commented that most Afghani languages have been in close contact for a long time and have influenced one another (in various degrees). Additionally, many languages share a common vocabulary, including etiquette, religious, philosophical, political, scientific and trade terms. There is wide influence by mass media and education. Everyday communication is less influenced by contact. Example of Persian. More influence of Persian than Pashto. Perhaps because Persian has higher prestige.

Prior to 1978, Balochi only existed in spoken form. As official languages, Pashto and Dari were the only ones written. Balochi was considered a minority language. After the revolution of 1978, the leaders tried to encourage language unity through language planning. At that time Balochi was elevated to a national language. [Influence of Soviet model] All five national languages were introduced into primary education. Each of the languages had a daily broadcast on Radio Kabul. In 1981, newspapers were printed in Balochi.

There is a Balochi-Pashto dictionary of 15,000 words that remains unpublished.

Should Afghanistan create an alphabet for Balochi when other countries have already established a Balochi alphabet?

Dari

John Thain described the 47 week Iranian Farsi course at DLI. Prior to 9/11 no Dari course was offered. After 9/11, a different model was introduced and they now offer a 16 week Dari class.

Only DLI and FSI teach Dari. University of Nebraska has an Afghanistan studies department and they have created a dictionary, but nothing else. There is a need for teaching materials, based on Dari spoken in Afghanistan. There are similarities between Dari and Farsi; however, there are enough differences that Dari should be taught independently.

Ronkin's bibliography for this workshop indicates some textbooks for Dari, but we still need more basic Dari texts. There is a 2003 text on the bibliography (Wahab) which no one at the workshop had yet seen.

In Afghanistan all foreigners are taught using Glassman's Conversational Dari which is judged to not be a bad text but it lacks the use of the script and thus has no reading material. Wheeler Thackston's introductory Persian course was mentioned as the only non-Teherani elementary Persian course.

Presentation on Defense Language Institute language pedagogy:

"Technologically Integrated Education: DLI's Response to Emerging Language Needs"

Persian

Pardis Minuchehr gave a brief history of the lengthy use of Persian from Iran to the Indian Subcontinent. In 20th Century, there are standardized languages. In contemporary Iran and in the teaching of Persian in the United States, the standard is Tehrani Persian. The language however does have different written vs. spoken registers and different spoken dialects.

(Please see further notes on Persian (below)).

Uzbek

Sabohet Khalilova described first the situation for the teaching of Uzbek in Uzbekistan itself. Uzbekistan has only been independent for 10 years. Prior to independence, all schooling was in Russian. Now that the state language is Uzbek there are materials in Uzbek for K-12, but no texts for

Uzbek as foreign or second language. There is a 2 volume, non-communicative based Uzbek textbook. Furthermore language instructors have neither pedagogical training nor materials. Some dictionaries are being published.

In this country, Indiana University is working to create materials to teach Uzbek as a foreign language. A native Uzbek philologist is working with a linguist from the University of Chicago to develop materials. However IU is not specifically working on Afghan Uzbek.

Statements and conclusions

- Persian/Farsi/Dari/Tajik

The workshop spent a certain amount of time trying to explain and logically deal with the relationships of these languages; the confusion that many have between them; the questions that arise as to whether they are different languages; the issue of national identity and language in contemporary Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan and the interests and needs in the United States today for teaching, learning and research.

Brian Spooner made a number of comments in this regard and his 1994 article "Are We Teaching Persian? or farsi? or dari? or tojiki?" (in Marashi, ed., Persian Studies in North America. 1994. Bethesda: Iranbooks) was distributed to the audience.

Spooner pointed out that prior to World War II, Persian was offered as a secondary language for the study of India and as a classical language. It was considered the language of the Eastern Islamic World and taught as a language of wider communication as well as a classical literary language. After WW II, Iran was increasingly considered part of the Middle East. Classical Persian thus is the basis for Iranian Farsi, Afghani Dari, and Tajik in Tajikistan.

A statement of where Persian is as a language of literacy today is considered important by Spooner. It needs to point out the necessity of learning Persian for multiple disciplines: South Asian Studies; Near Eastern Studies; Anthropology; History; Art History; Religion. We also need to comment on how to teach written and spoken Persian. The workshop members recognize that it is unlikely that any university will offer 3 different courses for Persian, but they might offer classical Persian with options to go on in Farsi, Dari or Tajik.

The example of the study of Arabic and the vernacular versus standard varieties was discussed. In the study of Arabic it is assumed that if you know Standard Arabic it is easier to learn vernacular than the reverse situation. Can and should a Persian model be created? For example perhaps 1-2 years of basic Persian with its literary heritage and then specialization at the intermediate and advanced levels.

Issues that we considered were

- ♦ The study of Persian is and has been in significant decline in the U.S. for years.
Replacements for retiring faculty are few.
- ♦ Degree of difference between Farsi - Dari - Tajik.
- ♦ Who are the students? Many students are ones with heritage background.
- ♦ If Farsi is used as a base there is the difficulty of switching between dialects and it would no doubt privilege the Tehrani dialect since most teachers in the U.S. use this dialect.
- ♦ What is the goal of a language program in Persian/Dari/Farsi/Tajik? To create literary scholars? Language as an enabling tool? Languages for government or business purposes?

- Funding issues and needs

Government funding must be recognized as not sustainable, especially for less commonly taught languages. Institutionalization of the teaching of certain languages must be assured. And most significantly in this area tenure track positions for language teachers are a must.

Funding of language programs by heritage language communities must be sought

Most significant need is to retool current teachers in methodology, pedagogy and technology. Then to train new instructors.

Intensive summer language programs need to be increased and enhanced.

- Specific recommendations

- Web sites

The workshop recommended the development of two websites (at least).

a. Uzbek. Ms. Khalilova, herself a Fulbright lecturer in this country for one year to teach Uzbek, noted that her position as such is in a long line of Fulbrighters brought here for one year to teach Uzbek. Feeling that each one (re)creates course material with no exposure to earlier work, she recommends the development of a website specifically as a place to deposit these materials for others to use. (Note: This is more likely to be taken up by CELCAR at Indiana rather than the SALRC.)

b. Dari. A Dari website was proposed for both bibliography and for course materials. With few institutions likely to ever offer Dari but a number offering Persian, this website can be developed as a supplement to Persian courses for those students interested in Afghan studies.

- Language priorities

- Teaching

Dari, Pashto and Uzbek must be taught in several U.S. institutions on a regular basis and through the advanced level.

- Materials development

Turkmen and Tajik appear to be in the greatest need for development though the demand is greatest for Dari-specific materials.

SALRC's grants, especially the new mini-grant competition, for planning and recycling of existing materials was discussed.

- Summer programs

Dari should be included in the South Asia Summer Language program (SASLI) with one year of Persian as a prerequisite

Indiana University and Ohio State University are expected teach Pashto during the summer.

[Note. There was little time to discuss overseas opportunities and no recommendations were made in this regard.]

Ms. Tamara Warhol, a Penn graduate student in Educational Linguistics, generously volunteered to act as recorder for these sessions for which I am very appreciative. I have edited her notes with some additions, subtractions and alterations.

Steven Poulos

December 2003