



## FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

**Subject Category (circle one):** Iranian Religion/Ceremony **History** Prayer Gathas  
Comparative Religion Shahnameh

**Age Group (circle one):** PreK-K Grades 1-3 Grades 4-5 **Grades 6-8** Grades 9-12

**Lesson # (if applicable):** Pre-Achaemenid Empire-Lesson 6

**Subject of the Lesson:** Origin of Persian Language

**Background Knowledge for the Teacher:**

Lesson Objective: To learn about the history of Persian language.

Lesson Length: 1 – 1.5 hour

Introduction: **Teacher** shares:

The origin of spoken language goes back to the beginnings of human society. Language has been changing constantly from one generation to another. These changes are mostly gradual and noticeable only cumulatively over the course of several generations. The Persian language is one of the oldest spoken languages in history.

See Handouts:

[Proto-Indo European Languages Handout](#)

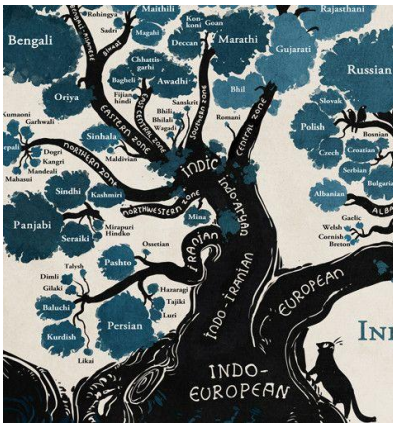


Image 1

Proto-Indo-European Languages

Many of the most commonly spoken western languages ranging from French to Farsi, come to us from this source. The common ancestor of the historical Aryan or Indo-Iranian languages, called the Aryan

parent language or Proto-Aryan, can be reconstructed by comparison of the (Old) Indo-Aryan with the (Old) Iranian languages.

The Indian group or Indo-Aryan (especially Vedic, the language of the Vedas), Avestan, and Old Persian show some remarkable similarities, especially with religious terms. (One could translate whole Avestan sentences word by word according to the phonetic laws into correct Vedic).

### Proto-Indo-European Languages (also known as PIE)

Population movements of people in prehistoric times played a large part in carrying the Indo-European Languages from a relatively restricted area, somewhere around the Black Sea, into Northern India, Iran, and Armenia and most of Europe.

Most of the subgroups spread out during the fourth and third millennia BC. This geographic distribution is what gave this family of languages its name, with “Indo” coming from “Indos” the Greek word for India.

### Indo-Iranian Languages

Iranian languages belong to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European Language family. Iranian languages are spoken in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and parts of Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, and scattered areas of the Caucasus Mountains.

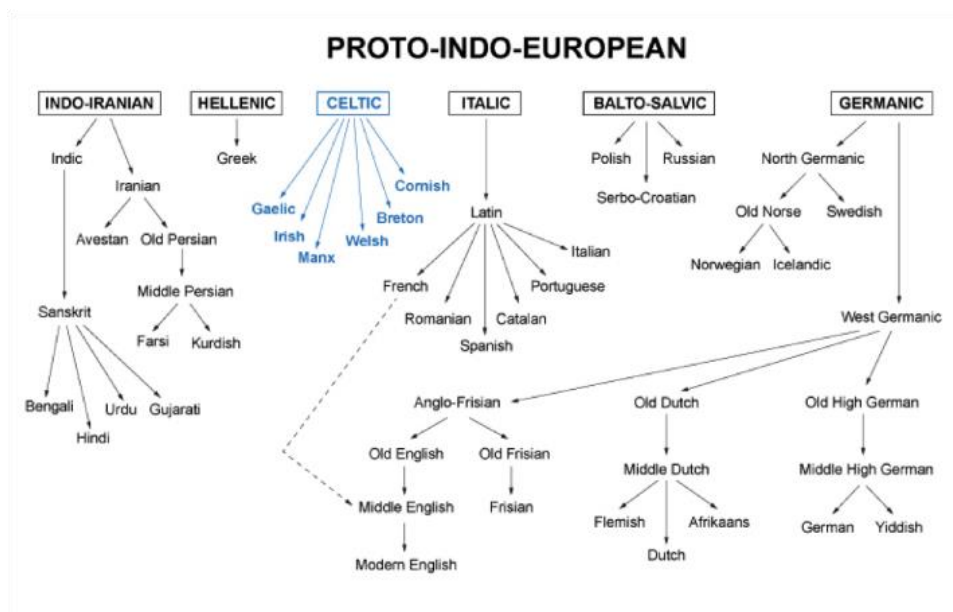


Image 2



Linguists typically approach the Iranian languages in historical terms because they fall into three distinct categories—Old, Middle, and Modern Persian.

Old Persian Languages

The two subgroups in Old Iranian Languages are: Avestan and Old Persian.

▪ **Avestan language**

Avestan is an extinct East Iranian language, which was probably spoken in Northeastern Iran. **It is the language of the Avesta, the sacred book of Zoroastrianism.**

Avestan was a language known only to priests. It probably ceased to be used as an everyday spoken tongue about 400 BCE, but the sacred word was passed down from generation to generation through oral recitation.

▪ **Old Persian Language**

Old Persian was the language of the Achaemenid dynasty court. It was first seen in the inscriptions of Darius I (ruled 522–486 BCE), of which the longest, earliest, and most important example is that of Behistun.

Middle Iranian Languages

Middle Persian was known in three forms: inscriptional Middle Persian, Pahlavi (often more precisely called Book Pahlavi), and Manichaean Middle Persian.

The **Middle Persian** form belongs to the period 300 BCE to 950 CE and was, like Old Persian, the language of southwestern Iran. Whereas Parthian was the main language in the northeast and northwest. Examples of Parthian come from inscriptions and Manichaean texts.

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*(Middle Persian – Pahlavi Script – omniglot.com)*

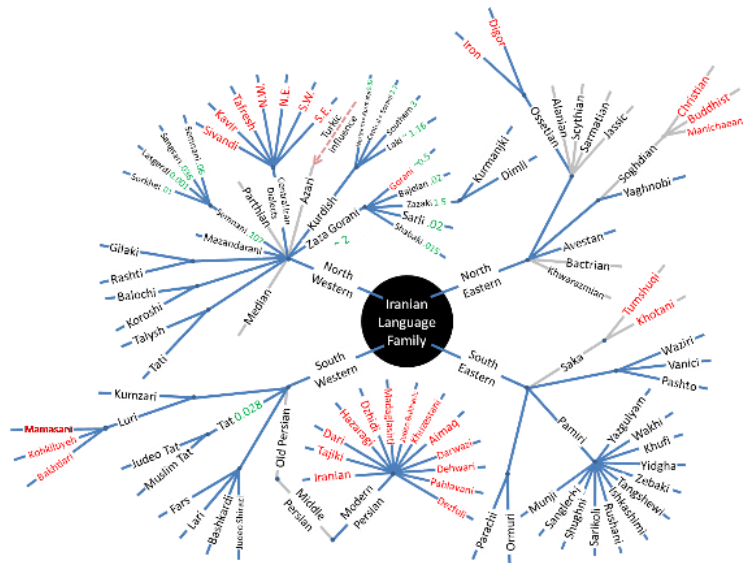


Image 3

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iranian\\_Language\\_Tree.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iranian_Language_Tree.png)

### Modern Persian languages

Only four of the many modern Iranian languages are the official languages of the state in which they are spoken.

Persian (known also as Farsi) is a West Iranian language and the **national language of Iran**. A dialect of Persian known as Dari is recognized also as a second language in Afghanistan. About 30,000,000 people speak Persian.

Pashto is the **national language of Afghanistan** which is an East Iranian language. The majority of Pashto speakers are in Pakistan. About 35,000,000 people speak Pashto.

Tajik is another West Iranian language **spoken in Tajikistan** and part of Central Asia. It is intelligible to Persian speakers. About 7,000,000 people speak Tajik.

Ossetic is an East Iranian language not mutually intelligible with any other Iranian language and is **spoken in North Ossetia in Russia and South Ossetia in Georgia**. About 500,000 people speak Ossetic.



Image 4

Two other Iranian languages, namely, **Kurdish and Baluchi** are spoken over vast areas.

However, they are not officially accepted as the national languages of an established state. More than 6,000,000 speak Baluchi as their main language in Pakistan, Afghanistan, central Asia, and Eastern Iran.

It is incredible to note the similarities between the PIE languages after thousands of years of migration and change. Below, you will see words for "mother" that descend from a common Proto-Indo-European root. Imagine how many other words in English, Farsi and Gujarati share the same roots!

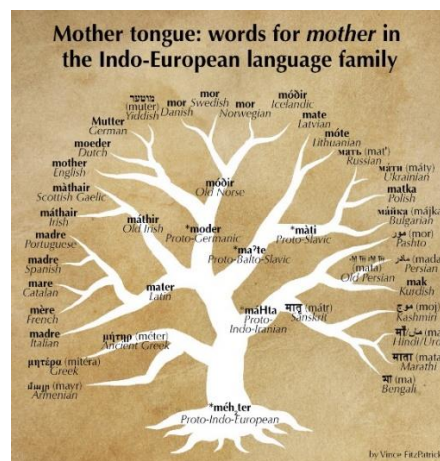


Image 5



## Lesson for Student:

### 1. Language changes over time.

- a. Give a few lines as an example from a play by Shakespeare and compare it to modern English. Example below provided in Lesson 6 Handout as Image 6

#### Original Prologue

Two households, both alike in dignity  
(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene),  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,  
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows  
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.  
The fearful passage of their death-marked love  
And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
Which, but their children's end, might could remove,  
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage—  
The which, if you with patient ears attend,  
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

#### Modern English Prologue

In the beautiful city of Verona, where our story  
takes place, two families, both well-known and  
well-respected, explode from a long-standing feud into  
new violence, and citizens stain their hands with the  
blood of their fellow citizens. Two unlucky  
children from these enemy families fall in  
love and commit suicide. Their unfortunate deaths  
end their parents' fight.  
For the next two hours, we will watch the story of  
their ill-fated love and their parents' anger, which  
nothing but their children's deaths could end.  
If you listen patiently to the action onstage, we will try  
to cover everything that we have missed in this prologue.

:

- b. Shakespeare was born in 1847. Ask students to calculate how many years ago that was.
  - c. Zarathushtra lived about 1700BCE. Ask students calculate how many years that was. Then have them compare the two.
  - d. Conclusion: English language has changed in just 175 years, now imagine how much it has change in 3700 years.
- ### 2. As Aryans migrated across Europe and India, they took their language with them and as they settled in different areas where the dialect changed.
- a. Show them image 1 and ask students to name some of the main languages branching off Indo-Iranian section.
  - b. Show them image 2 and have them search how each branch (Indo-Iranian, Hellenic, Celtic, etc.) call mother. They should recognize that they are from the same root.
- ### 3. Iranian Language
- a. Avestan (language of the sacred book of Zoroastrians)
  - b. Old Persian (Achaemenids-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)
  - c. Middle Persian (Parthian and Sassanid and some centuries after- 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to 9<sup>th</sup> century CE)
  - d. Modern Persian (Spoken today)
  - e. Look at image 3. The name of how many languages do you recognize?
  - f. Today Iranians speak many different dialects. Show them image 4.
  - g. Possible videos to share from YouTube:
    - i. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dh\\_ESWjaf1E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dh_ESWjaf1E)
    - ii. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdxVTnRLwQw>



h. Have students use image 5 to see the similarities and differences for the word mother between different languages that stem from the same root.

4. Discussion:

- What is the takeaway from this lesson?
- How can this lesson help you in understanding your religious scripture or the world around you?

**Activity for Student:**

- Take a line from one of our prayers. How many words can you recognize?
- Which prayers are easier to understand if you speak Farsi?
- What words are the same in Avestan/Pahlavi as in Farsi/Gujarati?
- What new insights do you have about your prayers?
- Please visit the “Teachers’ Guide” section of the website ([fezana.org/education](http://fezana.org/education)) and use suggested activities files to view more activity ideas.
- Indo-European Languages

Have students look up mother, father, new, six, daughter in Persian, German, Sanskrit and Spanish and compare them to one another. What do they notice? Do they sound like they can be linguistically from the same root?

English	Sanskrit	German	Persian	Spanish
Mother	ma-tár	mutter	mudar	madre
Daughter	duhitár	tochter	dokhtar	hija
Six	sát	sechs	shesh	seis
Father	pitár	vater	pedar	padre
new	návas	neu	no	nuevo

**Sources:**

- Google (Illustrations)
- Encyclopedia Iranica
- <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avestan-language#pt2>
- Encyclopedia Britannica
- [https://www.google.com/url?q=https://images.app.goo.gl/7SBChsqiDSvW72Z56&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1660696071960467&usg=AOvVaw2phlq819nes3IE\\_Q1-Ftqu](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://images.app.goo.gl/7SBChsqiDSvW72Z56&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1660696071960467&usg=AOvVaw2phlq819nes3IE_Q1-Ftqu)

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