Universiteit Leiden

Bilingual dictionaries and their impact on the Persian language

Applicants

Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach.

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Dr. Siavash Rafiee Rad	Middle Eastern Studies / Linguistics
Prof. Sasha Lubotsky	Linguistics

Project description

The production of Persian dictionaries dates back to the Middle Ages. One example of the earliest Persian dictionaries is the 11th-century dictionary by Qatrān Tabrīzī, which comprises popular vocabularies of the time. The methods used in the lexicography of Persian dictionaries in pre-modern times are different from that of Western ones. For instance, the order of lexical items is mainly based on the last letter of each word instead of the first letter. In addition, the fact that the production of Persian dictionaries extends to other countries including Turkey and India, where Persian was used as a language by the elites during this period, allows scholars to investigate the sociolinguistic impact of such dictionaries and their role in the transmission of knowledge between these territories.

The use of these dictionaries by scholars played a crucial role in the translation of the works of medieval Persian scholars such as Khārazmī (9th century), Irānshahrī (9th century), Al-Rāzī (10th century), Al-Ṭabarī (10th century), and Al-Ghazālī (11/12th century), amongst others. These works were written mostly in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish or Persian as most of these scholars were bilingual and their works were translated to and from these languages in order to pave the way for dissemination of findings and discussions in disciplines such as philosophy, theology, literature and medicine etc.

Bilingual dictionaries provide invaluable information that can allow linguists to explore the impact of language contact and the role of languages in knowledge transmission. Moreover, linguists are able to investigate the changes that an individual language has undergone as an impact of such encounters, which are not limited to borrowings of words but also include those on syntactic constructions.

By collecting data from selected Persian-Arabic dictionaries from the 7th century up to and including the

15th century, taking into consideration their place of production, this research intends to investigate what information their contents offer with regards to language change (lexically and syntactically). In addition, the project will investigate for what purposes these bilingual dictionaries were used and what prominent sources were used in the production of these dictionaries.

Research Trainee Profile

The research trainees will be a 3rd year BA and/or a ReMA students of Middle Eastern Studies who will have knowledge of Persian and Arabic. They will be expected to apply the language skills they have acquired in their academic studies in order to be able to find certain lexical items, identified by the primary investigator of the project, in the dictionaries. They will then create an electronic database of these lexical items' occurrences. They will also use their knowledge of grammar to identify the argument structure associated with these lexical items and provide contextual examples that they identify in the sources. In addition to using their language skills, they will be able to acquire new skills such as working with manuscripts and they will familiarise themselves with these unique sources hosted at the Leiden University Library (or if necessary with sources that are available digitally from other libraries such as the Bodleian Library, the British Museum and many other libraries internationally). The primary investigator, Dr. Siavash Rafiee Rad, has already worked with manuscripts and published in the field of manuscript studies, and will be able to provide the necessary trainings for the recruited students in terms of dealing with manuscripts and extracting data from these manuscripts as primary sources. The students will also acquire transferrable skills such as compiling linguistic corpora using IT skills, data tagging, transliterating and translating the extracted data.

Collaboration

The project will bridge the fields of linguistics and Middle Eastern studies, and provide an opportunity to work with the Special Collections in the University Library, which contains an invaluable range collections of Arabic and Persian dictionaries and manuscripts. The research will also allow strengthening the link between the field of manuscript studies within the Special Collections in the Library and the fields of linguistics and Middle Easter studies. The findings of the research will also provide scholars of various fields with the opportunity to collaborate as some of these dictionaries and manuscripts are linked to other fields of studies such as literature, philosophy, sciences, etc.

Deliverables

The database will be used for analysis by the supervisors to collaborate and produce a joint research proposal focusing on the prominent factors in changes which the Persian language underwent between the 7th and 15th century with regards to its lexical and syntactic constructions (of selected verbal constructions and the types of arguments of these verbal constructions). The project will also explore the factors that instigated such changes.

Planning

1. Identifying the Persian bilingual dictionaries in the Special Collections in the Library of Leiden University.

2. Identifying similar copies of these dictionaries and determining their time of their productions.

3. Classification of dictionaries based on their subjects with regards to their fields and their lexicographical methodologies and content (meaning whether they only contain verbs or a mixture of lexical items of various categories).

4. Creating a list of selected verbs and lexical items based on the theme of the dictionaries and creating a list of offered definitions/translation in the other language (Persian or Arabic).

5. Identifying similar definitions/translations offered in both monolingual Arabic and Persian dictionaries for the same lexical items.

6. Compiling a tagged and transliterated database of the lexical items and verbal constructions with the type of examples they offer as well as identifying the source of these example (literary texts, philosophical texts, religious texts, etc.).

Student Application
Students should send a CV along with a motivation letter (to the email address S.Rafiee.Rad@hum.leidenuniv.nl) specifying how their academic and their language/linguistic trainings will enable them to carry out the required tasks. In their motivation letter, they should also explain how this position would enhance their skills for developing their academic career.