

Learner profile: Dari

This guide presents common challenges faced by Dari learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems. However, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.



Facts

- **Language family:** Persian.
- **Native speakers:** 20.5 million.
- **Location:** Dari is the official language of Afghanistan.
- **Writing system:** Persian, based on the Arabic writing system.

Dari, Farsi and Persian

- Dari is the name of the group of Persian dialects spoken in Afghanistan. The term 'Dari' was chosen to create a national identity within Afghanistan and distance the country from cultural, historical and linguistic ties to Iran and Tajikistan. However, some Persian speakers in Afghanistan will call their language Farsi or Persian as they reject this division.
- Some dialects of Afghanistan sound closer to Tajik (spoken in Tajikistan) whereas formal Dari is closer to Iranian Farsi.

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Pronunciation

- Dari places stress on the final syllable of a word and therefore speakers may find it difficult to learn the rhythm of spoken English.
- The 't' and 'd' sounds in Dari are produced further forward in the mouth than in English.
- Dari does not have the sounds / / (as in the beginning of 'rabbit'), / / (as in the beginning of 'think') and /ð/ (the sound at the beginning of 'that').
- Consonant clusters in English may be difficult for Dari speakers to articulate. They may get round this by adding vowels between the consonants (e.g. 'pelate' for plate) or starting a word with a vowel (e.g. spring becomes 'espring').

Grammar

- Subject pronouns can be dropped in Dari as inflections to the verb will inform the audience who is being referred to.
- The standard word order in Dari is subject-object-verb and adjectives typically follow the noun. This may lead to mistakes such as 'I dog small saw' instead of 'I saw a small dog'.
- Adverbs of time might be placed after the subject because time phrases are inserted between the subject and object in Dari. For example, 'I yesterday met them' instead of 'I met them yesterday'.
- Questions are formed in Dari through a rising tone or adding a tag question. Pupils will need to learn the do-support structure in English question formation, e.g. 'Do you like pizza?'.
- Dari does not have definite and indefinite articles, as in English, but rather the nouns are inflected with suffixes.
- The verb 'to be' is also added to nouns as a suffix which may lead pupils to omit it when speaking Dari.
- Dari does not have the range of modal verbs which English does, instead having just one modal verb. The nuances of meanings between, for example, 'could', 'might', 'should' and 'must' may confuse Dari speakers.
- Dari has one 'human' 3rd person singular pronoun which can be used to refer to men and women. Dari speakers may become confused about which pronoun to use in English, and this may result in sentences such as 'I live with my mum. He is coming to pick me up.'

Writing

- Dari is written from right to left. Dari pupils may form question marks and commas in a way that seems to be inverted in English as they are used to forming punctuation this way when writing from right to left.
- Numerals are written differently in Dari to in English. For example, 14 is 14 and 27 is 27.
- There are no capital letters in Dari but the form of the letter changes depending on where it appears in a word.
- Quotation marks are rare and therefore this may cause confusion with regards to reported speech. For example, 'she said she's happy' may instead be written as 'she said I'm happy'.

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Vocabulary

- There are Arabic and English loan words in Dari.
- New words are often created through compounding two existing words together.
- The word 'pyjama' was borrowed to English from Persian and the pronunciation we use is thought to have come from the Dari dialect.

Cultural Differences

- As a sign of respect, Dari speakers may refer to people by their profession (e.g. 'Mr Doctor').
- Educated Afghans may be able to speak both Dari and Afghanistan's other official language, Pashto. Dari is often used as the lingua franca in Afghanistan.

Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons

Some lessons which might help based on the above differences:

Beginner > A Few Basics > Personal Pronouns

Beginner > Handwriting: Letters & Numbers

Beginner > Phonics 1 > Additional sounds

Beginner > Phonics 2

Beginner > English Language > Capital letters

Beginner > English Language > Sentence types

Beginner > English Language > Subject-verb agreement

Beginner > Punctuation

Intermediate > Career & Studies > Modal verbs of obligation