

## 11 Conclusion

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The previous chapters have provided a panorama of the main topics studied in the Persian manuals of the science of meanings (*'ilm-i ma'ānī*). More than a hundred technical terms have been discussed, clarified, and contextualised alongside the general principles and concepts. I have examined how the discipline looks at the speaker's intention behind the utterance and how a set of pre-established patterns reshape pieces of discourse to convey different senses, from direct to subtle meanings. The Persian science of meanings was the product of two highly influential legacies: the Arabic science of meanings as a model and the Persian classical poetry as a canon of eloquence. Both have played a role in shaping the Persian discipline as it is today, including strengths and weaknesses. This concluding chapter offers some reflections on the Persian science of meanings in terms of its nature, relationship with the Arabic model, and significance as a literary study.

The object of study is the utterance (*kalām*), that is, a sentence in a context. Utterances can inform, show knowledge of facts or thoughts, ask, command, forbid, express sentiments, and induce many other effects. Such results are obtained through a range of operations that manipulate the utterance and its components in smaller or larger scale. On one hand, the so-called *aḥwāl* 'states' cover the different forms and functions of the basic components of an utterance. On the other hand, specific cohesive features and strategies organise larger sequences of utterances. Syntactic forms and patterns of expression

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have codified functions that the language user can play with to find what best suits the situation. The context is made up of many varied elements. These include information about the people with whom the speaker is interacting (rank, attitude, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings among others), surrounding words given in previous utterances, and the shared knowledge of the world and of linguistic conventions. From the point of view of the search for eloquence (*balāġat*), the pragmatic linguistic attention that characterises the discipline is considered relevant.

Eloquence requires perspicuity. And the science of meanings considers where ambiguity may lie in utterance formulation. First, the same form can take on different meanings in different contexts. Second, different forms can achieve similar meanings in different contexts. To justify the economy of forms in relation to the sea of meanings, and vice versa, the science of meanings advances the hypothesis of different levels in language. For many linguistic forms, a primary and several secondary meanings may be identified. Contextual references, whether lexical or logical, clarify which of these multiple meanings should emerge as the correct meaning of the utterance. The utterance is seen as an organised system where each component should make sense within the framework of internal and external references.

The *ma'ānī* 'meanings' that give the science its title are also linked to the idea of expectation. The speaker, it seems, has a kind of mental image of what he wants to communicate before any word is uttered. Expressing such an idea in a form that is transparent and consistent within the context opens the way to linguistic efficiency. Each situation creates an expectation, which also enables the addressee to make predictions. The spoken utterance, then, either meets the expectations or, if there is a reason to do so, breaks them. The more expectations are broken, the more meaning is expressed. However, this general principle only works within certain conventional limits described by the discipline. Indeed, in order to distinguish efficient expressions from bad ones, the condition that there should be a reason is necessary. As a result, the science of meanings teaches both a grammar of expectations and acceptable breaches of expectations.<sup>1</sup>

With a few exceptions, Iranian scholars have essentially followed an imitative approach. Assuming that most of what was true for Arabic could also be true for Persian, Iranian scholars attempted to describe the latter language based on the results of a theory designed to describe the former. This method generally works in early

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of the unexpected as a means of eloquence in the Arabic tradition has been previously pointed out by Hatim, who calls Arabic rhetoric (*balāġa*) "the grammar of stylistic unexpectedness" (2010, 70), and by Harb, who considers it part of a wider "aesthetic of wonder" to which "the element of the unexpected" pertains (2020, 249).

bilingual manuals where Persian examples support the understanding of the Arabic science of meanings. Unfortunately, this method fails to provide a complete picture of the expressive possibilities of the Persian language. On the one hand, some Persian linguistic operations are overlooked. On the other hand, some operations are given more space than may be relevant to Persian. This has also biased more recent works that focus on Persian. Although these tend to pay more attention to the peculiarities of the language under study, they are not necessarily equipped for a comprehensive re-examination of Persian syntax from a pragmatic perspective. This is suggested by the fact that scholars tend to disagree on the interpretation of some typical Persian forms. Conceivably there is room for further developments of the Persian science of meanings. This may well happen in the coming years through a more detailed analysis of the Persian linguistic reality.

In this outline, I have tried to highlight the instances in which the adaptation of the science of meanings to Persian has necessitated a rethink. The basic principles and a big part of the sophisticated Arabic analysis can apply to the Persian language. Integrating Persian data into Arabic theory, however, required effort. The structural differences between the two languages posed some insurmountable obstacles, and the process of adaptation left obvious traces in the manuals. Phenomena relevant in Arabic shifted their original import once integrated into Persian theory. Iranian scholars, each according to their own sensibilities, reshaped and eschewed some of the topics that were part of their model. Likewise, transferring taxonomies from Arabic to Persian occasionally showed some weaknesses. They generally perform well at the top of the taxonomic tree structure but can falter at lower nodes. In fact, sometimes the relevant level of detail in Arabic was almost irrelevant in Persian.

Arabic and Persian disciplines occasionally differ in the method. The Arabic model generally tends to tie a particular Arabic linguistic form to its pragmatic functions. Persian scholars in some cases have done the opposite. Two tendencies, form-oriented and function-oriented, coexist in the Persian manuals. The first aspires to consider Persian patterns of expression from a semantic and pragmatic point of view and, as we have seen, is probably still incomplete. The second explores the idea of some abstract functions whose existence is as possible in Persian as they were in Arabic, but whose forms in Persian may vary. Form and function generally overlap in the Arabic science of meanings, but not necessarily in Persian.

Handbooks generally use classical Persian poetry as a repertory of linguistic facts. This is perhaps a tribute to the long tradition of Persian rhetoric books, which were lists of technical terms, followed by a definition, usually brief, and a few poetic examples. Another possible reason is a perceived superiority of classical Persian

poetry over any other form of expression among Iranian scholars. If the science of meanings in addition to being a language science is a theory of aesthetic and literary merit, as it seems to be nowadays, then accordingly the best examples should come from poetry. Lines from different periods are quoted, but virtually no reference is made to possible changes in syntax through the history of the language.<sup>2</sup> The science of meanings, arguably prefers to describe a set of universal criteria and eternal functions. It appears that these criteria and functions are assumed to be stable and intrinsic features at the very core of the Persian language.

The integration of poetry into the system of the science of meanings has obvious consequences which need to be considered. First, poetry is regarded as being composed of utterances. The smallest meaningful string in classical poetry is generally considered to be the *bayt* 'line' which usually carries a complete concept. The utterance, thus, becomes another category through which the single line of poetry is discussed. Second, because utterances are sentences in a context, lines of poetry should also be immersed in a context. While it is easy to agree that poetry has internal and external references, it is more difficult to understand the interplay of other elements of the context. Poems handed down through generations have only a few ties to the original context of utterance. And we may have no idea of the original addressee and the hearers. In a context that is often fictional, the idea of a speaker and an addressee whose attitude influences the formulation of the utterance does not seem very clear. Third, like any other utterance, poetry should respond to the requirements of the situation through mechanisms of met and violated expectations. However, if the role of the addressee in poetry is not clear, whose expectations should the poet meet or breach?

A paradigm shift may be a possible solution to the last two paradoxes. Not only does the utterance reflect the context, but the context also emerges from the utterance. The poet, like any speaker, works under several constraints. He should carefully polish all the elements of the utterance to faithfully reproduce the idea he has in mind. Among the various tools at his disposal, the subtleties of syntax help to paint a credible portrait of an otherwise imaginary context of utterance. Skilled poets manipulate the tools to reproduce the authentic mechanisms of speech and the audience seemingly accepts the created as if it were real. The more information about the context that is given, the more valuable the line of poetry is. From this perspective, the theory can apply whether the context is real or fictitious.

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<sup>2</sup> For a similar critique of the lack of diachronic perspective in Persian rhetorical studies, see Fašāraki 1974. See also Kārdgar 2016.

The principles of the science of meanings are also used to explain certain literary conventions typical of classical Persian poetry. From a stylistic point of view, the discipline is also a study of how poets got the most out of syntax and how they employed different techniques to enhance their compositions. A theory grounded in linguistics becomes a means to explain literary practices.

In a sense, the Persian science of meanings today is also a philological practice. Philology seeks to make sense of texts. Texts are to be preserved in both form and content. The discipline outlined in this monograph preserves a number of lines of poetry and provides tools for understanding the exact meaning of these lines beyond literalness. Many more examples than I could mention in this outline illustrate the various taxonomies, and the activity of selecting examples is part of the individual contribution of each scholar who has written a handbook. The ability to recognise appropriate patterns of expression in a literary corpus is required of someone trained in the field. Some recent textbooks also contain exercises in which the learner is asked to identify a particular operation in a line of poetry. Rarely, if ever, is the learner asked to produce an utterance as an exercise.

As well as offering interesting insights into poetry, and a theory of linguistic efficiency, the Persian science of meanings broadens our knowledge of world literary theories. The importance it attaches to the subtleties of language, and the meanings that they can convey, may also provide food for thought for translators. Heightened awareness of the specific features of *ma'ānī* could provide an opportunity to rethink translation practices from Persian into other languages. As the experiment of 'translating' the Arabic science of meanings into Persian repeatedly proved, there is not a complete correspondence of forms, functions, and patterns between different languages. The beauty of syntax, as well as its subtle meaning, is easily lost in translation.

