

Helping Learners with Common English Difficulties

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Dari

Introduction & Background

This guide is designed to support ESOL tutors, volunteers, and staff working with **Dari**-speaking learners. It outlines the most common challenges these learners face when learning English and offers practical examples, explanations, and exercises to support more effective communication. The aim is to build understanding, patience, and confidence in supporting **Dari** speakers on their learning journey.

Dari

Pashto, Dari, and Farsi languages are spoken in Southern and Central Asian countries. Dari, Farsi, and Pashto are all Aryan (Iranian) languages belonging to the Indo-European language family. While Dari and Farsi are two accents of the same language, Pashto is a different language. Dari, Farsi, and Pashto both use the Arabic Alphabet, but they are completely different from the Arabic language

Dari (a variety of Persian spoken in Afghanistan) and English differ considerably in **phonology, grammar, writing, and vocabulary**, so Dari speakers encounter specific challenges when learning English.

Pronunciation & Phonology

1. Sounds not in Dari

- /θ/ (“*think*”) → often pronounced as /s/ or /t/
 - “*think*” → “*sink*” or “*tink*”
- /ð/ (“*this*”) → often pronounced as /d/
 - “*this*” → “*dis*”
- /v/ → sometimes pronounced as /w/
 - “*very*” → “*wery*”
- /ŋ/ (as in “*sing*”) → replaced with /n*
 - “*sing*” → “*sin*”

2. Consonant clusters

- Dari words are usually simpler in syllable structure; learners may insert vowels:
 - “*street*” → “*istreet*”, “*school*” → “*eskool*”

3. Final consonants

- Words ending in consonants can be tricky; learners may add a vowel:
 - “*cat*” → “*cata*”

4. Vowel distinctions

- English has more vowel sounds than Dari. Confusion between:
 - /ɪ/ vs /i:/ (“*ship*” vs “*sheep*”)
 - /ʌ/ vs /ɑ:/ (“*luck*” vs “*lock*”)



Grammar & Syntax

1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Dari has no direct equivalent of English definite/indefinite articles, so learners often omit them:
 - “*I bought book*” → “*I bought a book.*”

2. Verb tenses

- Dari verbs rely more on aspect and less on tense, so English perfect and continuous tenses are difficult:
 - “*I have eaten*” or “*I am eating*” may be confused.

3. Word order

- Dari is generally **SOV (Subject-Object-Verb)**, whereas English is **SVO**, leading to:
 - “*I the book read*” instead of “*I read the book.*”

4. Plural forms

- Irregular English plurals (*child* → *children*, *foot* → *feet*) can be confusing.

5. Prepositions

- Dari uses postpositions differently, making English prepositions tricky:
 - “*I am waiting you*” → “*I am waiting for you.*”



Vocabulary & Expression

1. Literal translation

- Learners may translate idioms or expressions word-for-word:
 - *“I am feeling bored” → “I feel boredom”*

2. Politeness & register

- Dari speakers may overuse formal expressions due to cultural norms, sounding too formal in casual English.

Writing System

1. Perso-Arabic script

- Dari uses a right-to-left script. Switching to the **Latin alphabet** for English can slow reading/writing fluency.

2. Direction adjustment

- Learners must write left-to-right in English, which can be tricky for beginners.

Sociolinguistic Factors

- Exposure to English varies: some Dari speakers have access through schools or media; others may have limited opportunities.
- Dialectal differences within Dari are minor but can influence pronunciation in English.

Summary

Dari speakers usually struggle with:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tenses, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary & expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** Latin alphabet, left-to-right orientation

Common mistakes Dari speakers make in English

Pronunciation Mistakes

1. /θ/ → /t/ or /s/

- “think” → “tink” or “sink”

2. /ð/ → /d/

- “this” → “dis”

3. /v/ → /w/

- “very” → “wery”

4. Consonant clusters

- “street” → “istreet”, “school” → “eskool”

5. Final consonant vowels added

- “cat” → “cata”, “desk” → “desku”

6. Vowel confusion

- “ship” vs “sheep”, “luck” vs “lock”



Grammar Mistakes

1. Articles omitted

- Incorrect: “*I bought book.*”
- Correct: “*I bought a book.*”

2. Verb tense errors

- Incorrect: “*I go school yesterday.*”
- Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- Incorrect: “*I have eat lunch.*”
- Correct: “*I have eaten lunch.*”

3. Word order (SOV → SVO)

- Incorrect: “*I the book read.*”
- Correct: “*I read the book.*”

4. Plural errors

- Incorrect: “*Childs are playing.*”
- Correct: “*Children are playing.*”

5. Preposition mistakes

- Incorrect: “*I am waiting you.*”
- Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”
- Incorrect: “*I go to home.*”
- Correct: “*I go home.*”



Vocabulary & Expression Mistakes

1. Literal translation from Dari

- Incorrect: “*I have hunger.*”
- Correct: “*I am hungry.*”
- Incorrect: “*I have thirst.*”
- Correct: “*I am thirsty.*”

2. Over-formal expressions in casual conversation

- “*I request you to help me in this matter.*” → better in casual conversation: “*Can you help me?*”

3. Idioms / fixed phrases

- Literal translation issues: “*It rains heavily*” may be translated word-for-word and sound unnatural.



Writing Mistakes

1. Spelling influenced by phonetics

- “wery” for “very”
- “eskool” for “school”

2. Word order issues

- Literal translation from Dari SOV: “*I homework did yesterday*” → “*I did homework yesterday.*”

3. Direction adjustment

- Mixing left-to-right and right-to-left in early writing attempts

Examples in Conversation

- **Dari speaker:** “*I go school yesterday.*”
 - → Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- **Dari speaker:** “*This book very interesting.*”
 - → Correct: “*This book is very interesting.*”
- **Dari speaker:** “*I am waiting you.*”
 - → Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”

Summary

Dari speakers’ most common mistakes are:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, verb tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** Latin alphabet, spelling, left-to-right orientation

🎓 Teaching Strategies for Dari Speakers Learning English

🔊 Pronunciation Strategies

Challenges: /θ/, /ð/, /v/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants

1. Minimal Pairs Drills

- /θ/ vs /t/: *think – tink, three – tree*
- /ð/ vs /d/: *this – dis, that – dat*
- /v/ vs /w/: *very – wery, visit – wist*
- /ɪ/ vs /iː/: *ship – sheep, sit – seat*

2. Consonant Cluster Practice

- Start with added vowels: *eskool → skool → school*
- Gradually remove inserted vowels to produce correct clusters: *istreet → street*

3. Final Consonant Awareness

- Drill words ending in consonants: *cat, desk, lamp*
- Emphasize not adding extra vowels: *cat ≠ cata*

4. Recording & Playback

- Students record themselves reading sentences, then compare with native speakers



Grammar Strategies

Challenges: Articles, tenses, word order, plurals, prepositions

1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Use visuals: *a cat* (any cat) vs. *the cat* (specific cat)
- Fill-in-the-blank exercises: *I saw ___ apple, ___ sun, ___ cat*

2. Verb Tense Awareness

- Use timelines for past, present, future
- Storytelling activities to practice past tense: “What did you do yesterday?”
- Practice perfect and continuous tenses using real-life examples

3. Word Order (SOV → SVO)

- Sentence rearrangement exercises: *I the book read* → *I read the book*
- Pair work to build correct sentence structures

4. Plural Forms

- Drill irregular plurals: *child* → *children*, *man* → *men*
- Classroom games: memory match, “plural hunt”

5. Preposition Practice

- Teach prepositions in chunks: *wait for someone*, *go to school*, *sit on the chair*
- Role-playing exercises for reinforcement

Vocabulary & Expression Strategies

Challenges: Literal translation, idioms, over-formality

1. Idioms & Fixed Expressions

- Introduce gradually, with visuals or stories
- Encourage learners to use simplified equivalents initially: *“It’s raining heavily”*

2. Politeness & Register

- Teach casual vs. formal English:
 - Casual: *“Can you help me?”*
 - Formal: *“I request your assistance”*
- Role-play everyday situations: asking directions, ordering food, shopping

3. Avoid Direct Translation

- Encourage thinking in English structures rather than translating word-for-word from Dari

Writing Strategies

Challenges: Latin alphabet, spelling, SOV → SVO transfer

1. Spelling Practice

- Focus on tricky consonants and vowels: *very, school, desk*
- Dictation exercises using minimal pairs

2. Guided Writing

- Start with sentence frames: *I went to ___ yesterday*
- Build up to paragraphs with word banks

3. Direction Awareness

- Highlight left-to-right writing orientation
- Use lined paper to guide placement of letters

Speaking & Listening Strategies

1. Dialogues & Role Play

- Everyday scenarios: shopping, traveling, asking questions
- Encourage peer correction and self-correction

2. Stress & Intonation

- Clap or tap syllables to practice stress patterns
- Show meaning differences through stress: / *didn't say he stole the money*

3. Listening Exposure

- Short videos, songs, or podcasts with repetition
- Shadowing exercises: repeat immediately after native speaker

Cultural & Confidence-Building

1. Acknowledge Dialect Influence

- Minor regional Dari variations may affect pronunciation
- Use familiar vocabulary to ease learning

2. Safe Speaking Environment

- Peer groups, pair work, and games reduce anxiety
- Correct gently, focusing on communication first

3. Celebrate Multilingual Skills

- Dari speakers often juggle Dari, Pashto, or other languages – emphasize this advantage

✓ Summary

For Dari speakers, focus on:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, vowels, clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** idioms, literal translations, register
- **Writing:** spelling, Latin alphabet, direction
- **Interactive practice** is key – role-play, drills, and listening exercises are essential.

Common Dari phrases

Greetings & Basics

- سلام (Salam) → Hello / Peace
- چطور هستید؟ (Chetor hastid?) → How are you?
(formal / plural)
- چطور هستی؟ (Chetor hasti?) → How are you?
(informal / singular)
- خوب هستم، ممنون (Khoob hastam, mamnoon) →
I'm fine, thank you
- خدا نگهدار (Khoda negahdar) → Goodbye (lit. "May
God protect you")

Introductions

- اسم شما چیست؟ (Ism-e shoma chist?) → What is
your name?
- اسم من ... است (Ism-e man ... ast) → My name is ...
- از دیدنتان خوشبختم (Az didan-e shoma
khoshbakhtam) → Nice to meet you



Politeness

- تشکر (Tashakor) → Thank you
- خیلی ممنون (Kheyli mamnoon) → Thank you very much
- لطفاً (Lotfan) → Please
- ببخشید (Bebakhshid) → Excuse me / Sorry



Food & Drink

- آب (Ab) → Water
- چای (Chai) → Tea
- قهوه (Qahwa) → Coffee
- من گرسنه هستم (Man gursna hastam) → I'm hungry
- من تشنه هستم (Man teshna hastam) → I'm thirsty

Getting Around

- کجاست ...؟ (Kojast ...?) → Where is ...?
- قیمت آن چقدر است؟ (Qeemat an chqadr ast?) → How much does it cost?
- راست (Rast) → Right
- چپ (Chap) → Left

Polite Closings

- خدا نگهدار (Khoda negahdar) → Goodbye
- روز خوبی داشته باشید (Rooz-e khoobi dashte bashid) → Have a good day
- صبح بخیر (Sobh bekheir) → Good morning
- عصر بخیر (Asr bekheir) → Good evening
- شب بخیر (Shab bekheir) → Good night

 **Notes:**

- Dari uses the **Perso-Arabic script**, and pronunciation can vary slightly across regions in Afghanistan.
- Adding “**Lotfan**” (please) or “**Bebakhshid**” (sorry/excuse me) is common in polite conversation.