

PLSJ

Vol. 6, No. 9, 2017

DOI: 10.22099/jps.2017.4597, ISSN: 2322-2557

pp. 87-90

Soheili. A. *Reflections on Persian Grammar: Developments in Persian Linguistic Scholarship I*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars publishing, 2017. 283 pp. ISBN: 1-4438-5070-5

Mozhgan Hooshmand

University of Yasouj, Yasouj, Iran

m.hooshmand@yu.ac.ir

Soheili's *Reflections on Persian Grammar: Developments in Persian Linguistic Scholarship* is an attempt to situate major developments of Persian grammar in their historical and linguistic contexts. It aims to serve as an introduction to the long history of Persian grammar for English-speaking scholars. Students of linguistics and literature as well as teachers of Persian language constitute its audience. Soheili historically divides his discussion into inceptive, formative, progressive and modern periods. The volume consists of 6 chapters, a prologue and an epilogue followed by different appendices and indices.

The first chapter which is devoted to exploring the inceptive period of Persian grammar takes into account the earliest records of Persian linguistics and introduces Ibn Sina, a Persian philosopher, as the first grammarian and Adib Natanzi, as a master of prosody. In the field of prosody, reference is made to

Razi; however, he was not one of those figures whom Soheili promises to talk about in the prologue. Chapter 2 is the continuation of the inceptive period in which no grammar books were composed. Nevertheless, the lexicographers of that period described Persian grammar shortly in their dictionaries. The writer in this chapter deals with such works, explaining some of them very briefly and some, e. g. Anjoman Arya-ye Naseri, more thoroughly. The next chapter is devoted to the formative period. The author calls it as such due to the idea that the first formal grammar books appeared then. He explains and summarizes the main aspects of grammar dealt with in some of the first grammar books. The progressive period is dealt with in chapter 4. The author believes that there starts in this period a search for new grammatical framework derived from European languages; however, mention is made to traces of the Arabic model in this period as well. He first points to the differences between the grammars of this period and those of the previous ones. He then explains about the considerations for the selection of the works to be included in the chapter, the first of which is encompassing distinct components of grammar. Surprisingly, it seems that he equates the letters of alphabet with phonetics or phonology of the language (p. 64) without clarifying for the reader that he is reflecting the main authors' ideas in this regard. Afterwards, he explores some of the works from that period, though not based on the chronological order. In the fifth chapter, the writer first mentions a brief summary about the advantages of the works in the previous periods. He allocates this chapter to modern period, which marks the end of the traditional trends. He reviews the contributions of modern linguists who depart from traditional grammar in an effort to describe Persian in terms of the modern grammatical frameworks. The author introduces their works by referring to the special theoretical frameworks adopted and explaining in detail the included aspects of grammar. He sometimes brings about some criticism and points to the problems and shortcomings. The last section of this chapter is devoted to a

pedagogical grammar prepared for the purpose of teaching Persian grammar. In chapter six, called discourse analysis, a few works are referred to which take into account discursal features in explaining some grammatical aspects of Persian, such as scrambling, movements, the Persian object marker 'ra', etc. Finally, in the epilogue, the author highlights the influence of the Arabic model on the grammars of different periods. He, however, considers the effect very briefly, limiting it mostly to the terminology rather than the whole grammar, and manoeuvres on the similarities of Modern Persian to Middle and Old Persian. This part ends with the notion of relationship between form and meaning after referring to the idea of the Persian Sufi poet, Jalal-al Din al-Rumi regarding this relationship without a clear closing.

The book is worthy in its attempt to familiarize non-Persians with the tradition of Persian grammar, even though the author limits the audience to English-speaking scholars in the prologue. It also takes a critical standpoint towards the different works included in the book, while incorporating new grammatical theories into his discussion. However, sometimes it is not obvious whether the materials presented belong to the main works or the author's ideas toward them. With regard to the selected books, especially in chapter 5, no criteria are provided for including some and excluding others. Some works that were worth mentioning are missing, e. g. Yadollah Samare, Mohammad Dabirmoghadam, Ali Mohammad Hagh Shena, while others with lesser contributions, such as Ahmad Abu Mahbub and Manuchehr Adnani are included. Furthermore, in discussing the books sometimes a vast number of pages is devoted to a work whereas others are explained very briefly, among which are those that seem to be less known for their contributions in grammar even in the eyes of Iranians and need more detailed exploration. Some works are fully analysed and some others scarcely touched, no justification is offered in the book for the unequal shares he gives to analyses of various works.

Another point worth mentioning is related to the last chapter, titled discourse analysis. We cannot consider a work as discourse-analysis just because it has referred to some discursual features in explaining syntactic properties. Also, Role and Reference Grammar, the framework adopted in the works presented in this chapter, is mainly a syntactic framework which tries to incorporate a pragmatic layer to the linguistic analysis, and is not supposed to be considered as discourse analysis.

Besides, some mistakes catch the eyes of the reader in the course of reading the book. For example, the author considers homonymy as a special case of inclusion, mistaking homonymy for hyponymy (p. 147). Or, he uses the term 'phonological process' for morphological ones in section 5.6. The book also lacks a phonetic transcription guide for non-native audiences. A version of transcription appears as Appendix 1 that is not based on Persian phonemes or phones but on Persian alphabets (in which vowels are not represented). However, the author has provided two glossaries of grammatical terms in the appendices, which may be helpful for those not familiar with the Persian equivalences of the terminology.

In sum, it would be better for a book that tends to introduce the long history of Persian grammar to non-Persians, to include the most prominent works in this domain, and allocate sufficient space to each. The book would be more beneficial to students and teachers if it were not limited to lengthy descriptions of a number of books.

I recommend this book to those who wish to get a general overview of the works that have been of significance in the course of the development of Persian grammar.