



Considering the central role that Persian language and literature played in the literary, political, and social contexts in which Urdu arose and flourished in South Asia over the course of five centuries, it is hardly surprising that Urdu has borrowed a great deal of its linguistic and literary content from it. Most Urdu writers and poets know some Persian. Persian idioms and maxims, quotations from Persian literature, and Persian grammatical elements are found across a wide range of Urdu texts and contexts, from collections of poetry by major Urdu poets and popular qawwali performances to the modern humor of Mushtaq Ahmad Yusufi and Mujtabi Husain, and the dialogues, lyrics, and titles of Bollywood films. Claims about the death and disappearance of Persian in India under colonialism in the nineteenth century do not match the massive body of Persian publications or the sizeable corpus of Persian literary production in India and Pakistan in the past two centuries. Recent scholarship on the so-called “Indo-Persian” tradition has only begun to scratch the surface, and is in need of serious development if its historiographical and analytical models are to do justice to this massive archive.

This module introduces two elements of Persian grammar borrowed into Urdu that readers are likely to encounter in registers spanning from everyday speech to classical poetry.

The Persian *Izāfat*

The Arabic word *إضافة* [*izāfat*] means “increase” or “augmentation.” In the study of Persian grammar, it is used to refer to a relational suffix by means of which two words are joined to create a phrase. Urdu borrows many *izāfat* phrases from Persian, and Urdu writers, particularly poets, are free to generate their own *izāfat* constructions to enhance the beauty of their works.

In terms of pronunciation, *izāfat* is simply pronounced as *e* between two words. For example, in the Persian phrase used in everyday Urdu, *جان من* [*jān-e man*] (my dear).

In terms of writing, *izāfat* may be spelled in three ways. Most typically, it is spelled as a short diacritical marking, *zer* [◌] beneath the first word in the construction. For example, beneath *جان* in the above phrase, *جان من* [*jān-e man*] (my dear). If the second word in an *izāfat* construction ends with an *o* pronounced *ā*, then *izāfat* is written as a superscript hamzah. For example, *زمانہ دراز* [*zamānā-e darāz*] (a long time). Note that *izāfat* is written in its typical, *zer* form when *o* is pronounced as a breathy *h*—e.g., *بادشاہ عالم* [*bādshāh-e ālam*] (emperor of the world). Finally, when the first word ends



in the long vowels ا or و, it is written as ے [e]—e.g., دریائے فکر [daryā-e fikr] (a sea of thought [or worry]).

In terms of meaning, we can distinguish between three types of *izāfat* constructions

Noun-Noun. The first is a construction in which two nouns are joined. In this case, *izāfat* usually expresses a relationship of possession or composition and means “of.” Hence, بادشاہ عالم [bādshāh-e ālam] (emperor of the world).

Noun-Adjective. The second is a case in which the first element in an *izāfat* construction is a noun and the second is an adjective. In this case, the *izāfat* has no translation in English. It is simply a necessary grammatical element in Persian that acts to join the noun to its adjective. For example, زمانہ دراز [zamānā-e darāz] (a long time).

Adjective-Noun. This kind of *izāfat* is not as widely distributed in lexical terms as the others, but in the case of two adjectives, قابل [qābil] and لائق [lāiq] (both meaning worthy), it is very common. In these cases, the first element is similar to the English suffix -able or -worthy—e.g., قابل تعریف [qābil-e tārif] (praiseworthy).

Note that in many cases, the *izāfat* construction is not idiomatically interchangeable with its Indic or Urdu equivalent. For example, the phrase طالب علم [tālib-e ilm] (student) loses its idiomatic and technical sense when transformed into its literal equivalent علم کا طالب [ilm kā tālib] (a seeker [or demander] of knowledge). Likewise, the Indic Urdu phrase مقدر کا سکندر [muqaddar kā Sikandar] (lit. “Alexander of fortune;” idiom. someone who is extremely fortunate) is not interchangeable with its grammatically equivalent Persian *izāfat* form سکندرِ مقدر [Sikandar-e muqaddar], which, to my knowledge, is unidiomatic in Urdu.

The Persian Conjunctive

The Persian conjunctive و [o] (“and”) is ubiquitous in Urdu. In terms of spelling, it is written independently between the two words that it joins. For example, خرید و فروخت [kharīd o faroḵht] (lit. “buying and selling”). However, it is pronounced as if suffixed to the preceding word and prefixed to the succeeding one. Hence, خرید و فروخت is pronounced *kharīdofaroḵht* as one word without pauses.

Although و literally means “and,” Persian conjunctive constructions are not used interchangeably with اور [aur] (and) constructions in Urdu. Persian conjunctive compounds are almost always exaggerative, meaning that their sum is greater than the whole of their parts. Thus, خرید و فروخت may literally mean “buying and selling,” but idiomatically it means “commerce.” Persian conjunctive constructions therefore present translators of Urdu with a seemingly insoluble problem. Should they be translated word-for-word to capture the literal meaning and form of the Urdu—e.g., “buying and selling” for خرید و فروخت? Or idiomatically to capture the idiomatic sense, which often involves reducing them to a single word—e.g., “commerce?”