

THE ROLE OF PROVERBS IN FACILITATING REFUGEE INTEGRATION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: AFGHANISTAN CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

Overview. This presentation will explore practical methodologies, challenges, and opportunities for using proverbs to assist and improve refugee reception, integration, language learning, and cross-cultural understanding. We will propose that the AIP-IAP approve a formal motion that the organization promote and advance similar efforts worldwide for any group of refugees in a host country. To demonstrate real-world possibilities, our proposal will include two case studies of Afghan proverb use to welcome and assist Afghan refugees in Greece and the USA, and a third case study of proverb use in a medical treatment setting in Afghanistan.

Background. U.S. Navy Captain Edward Zellem, a Dari speaker, was deployed to Afghanistan in 2010-2011. He spent a year and a half with Afghans, hearing and using Dari proverbs every day. Zellem began collecting, translating, and using the proverbs as a personal project. His collections have been published in three bilingual books: “*Zarbul Masalha: 151 Afghan Dari Proverbs*” (Dari-English, 2011); “*Mataluna: 151 Afghan Pashto Proverbs*” (Pashto-English, 2014); and a large-format children’s book, “*Afghan Proverbs Illustrated*” (Dari-English, 2012).

Volunteers began translating *Afghan Proverbs Illustrated* into bilingual editions published in Dari and other languages. These included translations by AIP-IAP members Dr. Rui Soares (Portuguese), Dr. Liisa Granbom-Herranen (Finnish), Dr. Simion Cristea (Romanian), Lorenzo M. Ciolfi (Italian), Karin Johansson (Swedish), and Fionnuala Carson Williams (Irish). Other bilingual editions include Greek, German, Korean, Spanish, Albanian, Russian, Serbian, French, and Thai editions. All are available through major online book retailers.

The Dari-Greek edition was translated by Dr. Marina Mogli, who used the Greek-Dari edition to integrate and educate newly-arrived Afghan refugees in Greece. She will present the Greek case study.

The second case study, by Dr. Peter Unseth, will discuss current and potential use of the English-Dari editions of the Afghan proverbs books and posters in Afghan refugee resettlement in the United States. Dr. Unseth advocates finding ways to use traditional proverbs for the benefit of their communities. He has been involved in creating proverb posters for refugee contexts, distributing Afghan proverbs books to refugees, and drafting the “Proverbs for Refugees” proposal to be presented at ICP-21.

In a third case study, Major Rachel Stevenson, a U.S. Air Force trauma nurse serving at Craig Joint Theatre Hospital at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, used specifically chosen proverbs to help encourage, empower and heal our Afghan partners being treated.

Summary. Today’s Afghan refugee issue is urgent. Eighteen bilingual editions of *Afghan Proverbs Illustrated* currently exist in Dari and second languages that are spoken on six continents. These books can be used today to help educate and integrate Afghan refugees in national camps around the world, ranging from Germany to Portugal, Albania, Kosovo, Spain, Ireland, Italy, UK, Ecuador, USA and others.

We further believe that these early models and case studies of creatively using Afghan proverbs also can be used to help *other* refugee populations from (and in) *any* country or nation around the world. Expanding the use of bilingual proverbs and their host nation equivalents for refugee integration should be promoted by UNESCO, UNHCR, refugee agencies, and the AIP-IAP.

The presentation will be given jointly via Zoom by Captain Zelle, Dr. Mogli, Major Stevenson, and Dr. Unseth. It will conclude with a formal motion for a vote of approval by the AIP-IAP general membership, proposing AIP-IAP resolve that:

“Proverb scholars should make extraordinary and creative efforts to promote the use of refugees’ own national proverbs, and their host nation equivalents, to advance cross-cultural connection, human understanding, integration, and language education for all refugee populations and their host nations.”

Curriculum vitae

Captain Edward Zelle (U.S. Navy, Ret.) is the 12-time award-winning author of three bilingual books of Afghan Proverbs, now published in 20 languages. He is a retired U.S. Navy officer and trained Dari speaker who spent a year and a half embedded on native Afghan teams in Afghanistan. Captain Zelle became fascinated with the way Afghans use Proverbs in their daily conversations. He began collecting and translating them, and used them every day with Afghans in his professional and personal life. After students at a local Kabul high school offered to create illustrations, he decided to publish his collection as a personal project to share with the world. The Afghan Proverbs books are available in over 110 countries through Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and over 100 other major online book retailers. More information is available at www.afghansayings.com.

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Dr. Marina Mogli (University of Thessaly and Hellenic Open University) has a PhD in Applied Linguistics and has been teaching English for academic purposes in the University of Thessaly and the University of Manchester. She has also been teaching linguistics in the Master’s programme *Language Education for Refugees and Migrants* of the Hellenic Open University. She has participated in many research projects in Greece and abroad regarding second language learning, language teaching to immigrants/refugees, multilingualism, multiculturalism and immigrant/refugee integration. She has volunteered for many years and taught Greek to immigrants/refugees in her hometown, Volos, Greece.

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Dr. Pete Unseth (Dallas International University) teaches and writes about proverbs, urging people to find ways to use traditional proverbs in creative ways to benefit the community of speakers.

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Major Rachel Stevenson (United States Air Force) is passionate about reaching people’s hearts, whether in words or in her profession as a nurse. The opinions expressed here are her own, and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Air Force or the Department of Defense.

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