



در زبان اوبساید آمدن از زبان خود برون باید شدن

Language, Fahm, Life

INVITATION FOR CONTRIBUTION

People Talk Their Life and Live Their Language

'*Language* has always been a life issue of mine', says Sue-san Ghahremani-Ghajar. She views her challenges with language as dating back to when, as a young child, she lived with her family and community's language challenges in Abadan, south-west Iran. Her journeys with language were triggered with her memories of the conflicts she experienced between the Farsi, English, and LANGUAGE of her mother and the community around. She writes:

For a long time that character – LANGUAGE – took me on journeys to different places. These days I am trying to figure out how language is showing itself to me again. I see that most of all there is definitely something very spiritual about word.

Perhaps it was this *life issue* that moved her all the way to the other side of the globe to explore *language* and *language education* and later involved her in various language journeys and challenges.

This is probably the history behind our community of Hamrahan Center for Language Studies, which she founded as part of her journeys to explore, to search, to un/learn, and to re-live LANGUAGE. At Hamrahan we are involved in many various types of challenges with living and un/learning language with different people and at different places including our own un/learning circles and several schools as well as several universities, including Tehran University of Medical Sciences. Out of our many years of journeys and challenges with language, many un/learning stories have emerged which helped us create ever growing deeper and more beautiful views of language and life.

Among all these stories, our explorations of the language of medical education and medicine at Tehran University of Medical Sciences opened views to a new horizon of understanding how language creates perceptions and how perceptions create practices. In our five-year long exploration of various aspects of the language of medical education and the practice of medicine, involving more than 1000 medical students, we started to realize a crucial concept that we name *fahm*.

Fahm may be understood as fundamental individual and social perceptions, understandings and worldviews. The language-context in which people are submerged could essentially create their *fahms* of what life means and, therefore, could crucially shape their life practices. In many ways

fahm might appear to be similar to what has been referred to as 'perceptions', 'social cognitions', 'ideologies', etc. but the unique feature of the concept of *fahm* is that it is shaped through real life involvements in communities. This is to be distinguished from perceptions shaped through institutional involvements and practices and/or through mass media. The latter is what we name *vahm*. In other words, *fahm* appears when community members – to borrow Munir Fasheh's words – 'use words' as part of life while *vahm* is the result of 'being used by words'. With this conception of *fahm* one might also be reminded of a version of Whorfian views of language but unlike the views held by deterministic approaches to language, our concept of *fahm* is not something to which human beings are enslaved but it may be and perhaps must be challenged and transformed.

With the emergence of the concept of *fahm* and the evolving dialogues about it in our community, and in order to challenge mainstream institutional language studies which have mainly focused on formal and/or functional aspects of language as an instrument for conveying information and as a means of communication, we decided to create a space for reflection and sharing views on the diverse ways of life-shaping role of language.

LANGUAGE, FAHM, LIFE could be a theme of our dialogues in the upcoming meeting of Learning Societies Conferences in September 2007, Iran. We have also been planning to prepare a collection of writings reflecting the experiences and views of people from a diversity of religious, ethnic, geographical, linguistic, and occupational backgrounds reflecting on how people in their diverse communities *live their languages and how they talk their lives*. We hope that the contributions would illustrate a diversity of ways in which the language-context of communities creates their *fahms* and shapes their life.

Should you accept our invitation for contributing to this volume, please send us a 1-2 page summary of your contribution by **July 30, 2007**. The September conference would be a valuable opportunity for dialogue and for ideas to mature before you write the full contribution later. We would appreciate it if your summary would include what you find relevant from the following about the community of your concern:

- The linguistic context
- The geographical context
- The religious/ethnic context
- The occupational/institutional context
- Particular communities of your concern
- Particular practices of your concern

Your final contribution may vary from a 2–3000-word reflection on your experience with language, *fahm*, and life to a full length 8–9000-word discussion or research report.

On Behalf of Iran 2007 Learning Societies Conference Organizers

'Language, Fahm, Life' Editors

Sue-san Gahremani-Ghajar
Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini
Hossein Fattahi

CONTACT: samirhosseini@yahoo.com