How to Apply Children Core Vocabulary in The Simplified Version of A Classical Text: Elementary Farsi Reading Textbook

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Abstract

One of the most important subjects that should be considered by the authors of Farsi elementary textbooks is the application of proper vocabulary in accordance with the different levels of the age group lexical knowledge. In order to teach target vocabulary, the application of the core and mediator vocabularies is necessary. This article studied the core vocabulary in the classical texts of the 5th-grade Farsi reading textbook. A simplified classical text which was the rewriting of the opening part of "the cow and the lion" chapter in Kalila & Demna was the body of the analysis. The study was done by a quantitative approach and descriptive method. The analysis unit was vocabulary, divided into nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Totally 31 core vocabularies were located in the lesson. The most applied ones were nouns. This study indicated that according to the core vocabulary gradation list, 70.96% of the mentioned vocabularies were from the first and second quarters of the textbook, matching with the location of the lesson in the textbook. Thematic analysis showed that the most concentrated subjects in the core vocabularies were social relationships, family, home, the living environment.
Keywords: core vocabulary, elementary reading textbook, persian

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is a process ongoing through different steps of a human's life and is affected based on the special linguistic and psychological conditions of each individual. The basics, principles, and purposes of language learning are different according to the learner's age. In accordance with the child's growth, different activities, toys, tools, and educational texts are necessary to be applied. In the early years of a kid's life, he/she gradually gets acquainted with the various functions of his/her maternal language or languages (in early bilingual cases). Thus, primitive steps of language learning happen at home and with family; the next step is learning the standard language at school by an educational system which is a very important step for language acquisition (Arabi; Soltani; Esmi,2016:82-83). In elementary school, the basis of the Persian language and its four skills is founded within children. The skills in each grade are founded based on the knowledge acquired from the previous grades (DanaToossi,2011:12).

The Farsi elementary textbooks are the main source for the curriculum and are also essential for orienting the students' learning activities in the school(Nouriyan,2016:6). The content of the Farsi elementary textbooks and their teaching methods are always being

reviewed by the experts and are constantly under consideration of their authors. The textbooks are constantly observed and analyzed from different points of view such as structure, four language learning skills, teaching methods, and testing based on the paradigm and new theories of language learning (DanaToossi,2016:12-13).

Generally, one of the most important subjects to be considered by the authors of children and teenager books is the application of suitable vocabulary according to the child's age. If the vocabulary used in the books is unfamiliar for the reader, then he/she will not acquire the language skills properly. Along with language skill problems, later he/she will face difficulties in larger scales than language application. Farsi elementary textbooks are one of the most effective and impressive reading books for children and the vocabulary application in these books plays an important role in the future of child's language development (Alavi,2012:85).

Progress in the reading comprehension is one of the main purposes for achieving the reading skill. Obtaining good reading abilities for normal children and those with special needs is by teaching them how to read the visual words. Visual words are the most frequently used and familiar words in a language, read quickly, at a glance. These visual words are named core vocabularies and are used in teaching reading skills and are essential in Farsi elementary textbooks (Ne'matzadeh et al.,2011:47). It is crucial for teachers to be familiar with the core vocabulary and to be able to consider them in their education for elementary reading skills.

The classical literature of the Persian language is very rich. Great poets and authors are introduced by their works to the students from the first steps of language learning in elementary schools. The texts are simplified according to the students' grades. One of the classical books with a high literary value is Kalila and Demna. This masterpiece, with a Sanskrit origin, had been translated to New Persian from Arabic, in the 12th century A.C., by Monshi. Despite abundant changes in the subjects and writing style of this book in its path from the original Sanskrit to the New Persian version, this book is of great value in didactic literature (Dehghan, Samani: 2014:59).

In Iran, in the old curriculum of the last years of Farsi high school textbooks, one lesson was dedicated to the opening of the "Assad & Thowr" chapter from Kalila and Demna. This lesson was entitled "Lion and Cow" in the old Farsi (3) of humanity branch of high school (Ershad Sarabi et al. 2012:49-56). The text matched exactly with the original work (Monshi, 2018:59). In the new edition of high school books, this lesson is replaced with the Collared-Dove, another chapter of Kalila and Demna (Ghassempour et al, 2019:120-122).

In the 5th-grade elementary Farsi reading textbook, lesson four, is entitled "bāzargān va pēsarān" (the businessman and his sons). It is a simplified rewriting of the introduction of "Lion and Cow" chapter. This lesson exists in the old and new versions of the 5th-grade Farsi textbooks and the material is identical (Akbari et al, 2020:34-36). The author of lesson 4 has entered some parts of Demna's narrations from another fable of the original book. Therefore, the opening and the ending of the text are not from a unique fable (Ghamari,2019:104).

The purpose of this article is to study the core vocabularies of lesson 4 in the Farsi reading textbook, 5th elementary grade. This article intends to study the core vocabulary applied in this lesson in accordance with the students' Persian lexical knowledge. Also, answering this question: How much the author has paid attention to selecting the suitable core vocabulary in compliance with the location of the lesson in the textbook?

This analysis will indicate the most thematically focused subjects in the chosen core vocabulary, alongside with the factors that should be considered in the application of the core vocabulary in a textbook

Many articles and books are written about the vocabularies applied in the elementary Persian reading textbooks. One of the first researches entitled "The study of writing vocabularies of Iranian elementary school" was conducted by Fereydoon Badreyi (1973). Later in 1975 Mohammad Taghi Baraheni evaluated the frequency of vocabularies in the elementary Persian reading books and studied their effect on reading ability.

In 1995, Guiti Shokri published the "The elementary school dictionary". This dictionary contained about 15000 words. The corpus of her research was based on the five years of elementary school textbooks. Besides, in her research, she considered 50 other books written for the age group of elementary children; along with some magazines for children and the sentences used in the TV shows for juniors. Mehdi Zarghamiyan (1992) and Faramarz Safarzadeh (1997) wrote their Master's thesis on the reading vocabularies and speaking vocabulary of elementary school children.

One of the most important researches in the mentioned field, started in 2005, was conducted by Ne'matzadeh and her group. The purpose of this study was to obtain the exact data about Iranian children's core vocabularies. In this national research run in the different regions of Iran, the core vocabularies for the 1st to 5th grade of the elementary school were sorted based on the noun, verb, and adjective in both levels of perceptual and productive. The findings were achieved based on various evaluations by productive and perceptual tests. Also,

teachers were a source for finding out more about children's vocabulary knowledge (Alavi, 2012:91).

In recent years, various content analyses on elementary textbooks are done according to recent formulas and evaluative patterns. For example, As'adi (2019) assessed the readability of the 5th-grade Persian reading textbook, based on Gunning's readability test. This research indicated that this book is suitable for the 5th-grade students' level. On the contrary, the content analysis of the same reading book based on William Rumi's method showed that the content involvement index is less than 0.4 percent, and the book is not written actively (Negahban, Qolamhosseini, Farahani, 2020: 2216).

METHOD

This study was performed by a quantitative approach and descriptive method. The study corpus was the only classical text in the Farsi reading book, 5th-grade elementary school (2020). The content analysis unit was the vocabularies. All the vocabularies were counted in the lesson, without considering their frequency; then nouns, adjectives, and verbs were sorted. In the next step, according to the core vocabulary gradation in Ne'matzadeh's research, the application of the core vocabularies was assessed. Also, the core vocabularies were categorized thematically. At the end of the research, lexical borrowing from other languages was studied in the sorted core vocabularies. The results were shown on diagrams and charts.

At the end of each season of the 5th-grade Farsi reading textbook, there is a tale. Totally there are 6 tales. 4 out of the 6 tales are chosen from these classical texts: Javāme'-ol Hekayāt (by 'Oufi); Chahār Maghāleh (by 'Arouzi Samarghandi); Golestān (by Sa'di); Sobhat-ol Abrār (by Jāmi). They are located on pages 46, 96, 120, and 139. Each tale is about 7-9 lines and could not be used for the corpus study. Although the texts were classical, but the focus on these tales is on historical grammar. Therefore, the core vocabulary applied in them is rare.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The number of the core vocabularies in lesson four was 31. This was approximately equal to 6 percent of the core vocabularies in the 5th grade Farsi elementary textbook. As 18 words were from the 2nd quarter and 4 words belonged to the 1st quarter, therefore most 0f the core vocabularies were chosen correctly based on the location of the lesson in the textbook.

The pie chart No. 1/1 and the bar chart No.1/2 show the percentage and the number of core vocabulary in comparison with the whole textbook.
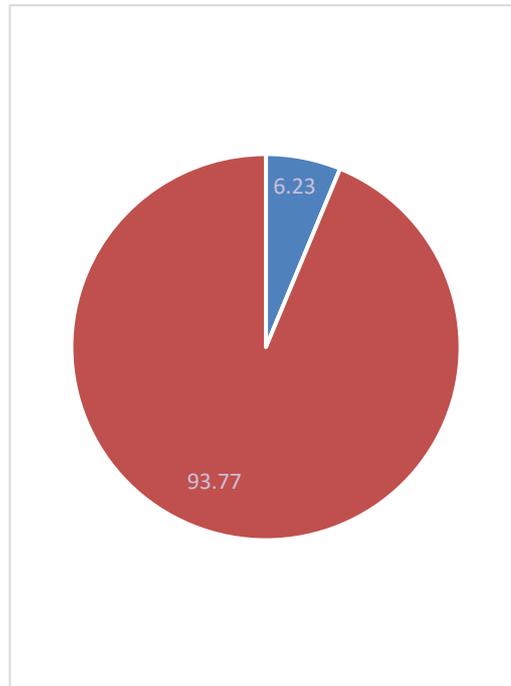
Figures 1. The percentage of the core vocabularies in lesson 4 comparing to the whole textbook of the 5th grade Farsi elementary.
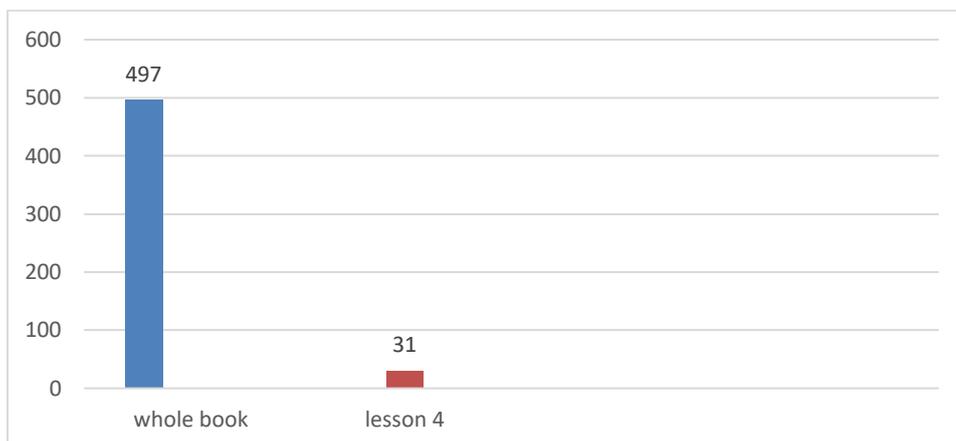

Figure 2.The number of the core vocabularies in lesson 4 comparing to the whole textbook of the 5th grade Farsi elementary.

Figure number 2 shows the frequency of the core vocabulary based on the four quarters of the textbook. As the studied lesson was in the second quarter of the book, this figure indicates that %58 of the core vocabulary applied in lesson four is chosen properly and in accordance with the location of the studied lesson. Adding the first quarter which is about %12/9 to the

second part containing %58 of the core vocabulary, the following figure (No.2) emphasizes that the majority of children's core vocabulary is chosen precisely in the right place.
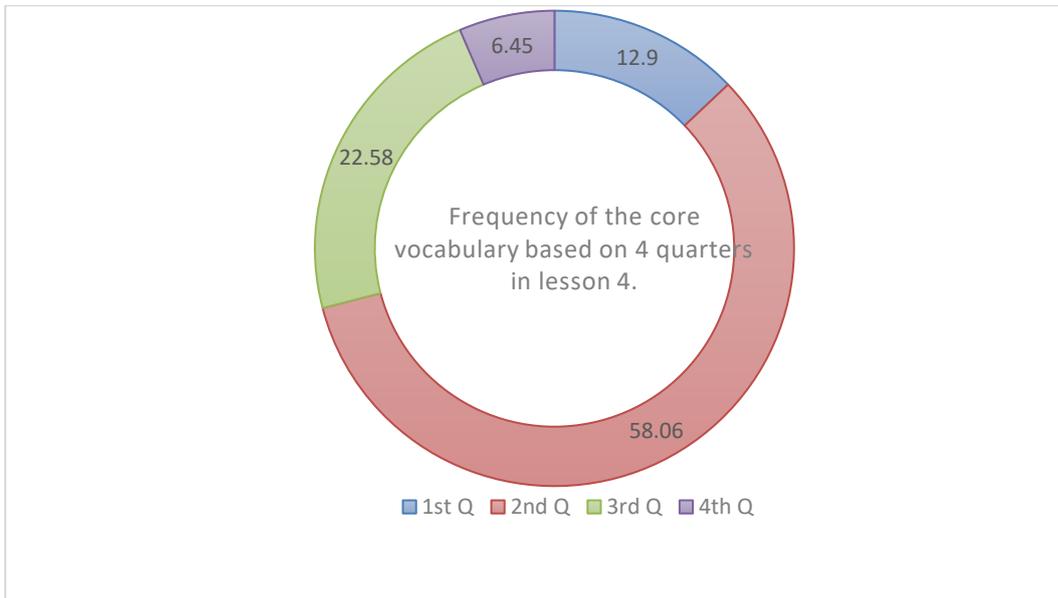

Figure 3. Frequency of the core vocabulary in lesson 4.

Determining the thematic frequency of the core vocabulary in lesson 4 showed that most core vocabularies belong to the social relation/communication, home/living environment, nature, and concepts. Figure No.3 shows the 23 subjects sorted from lesson 4, including their frequency. The reason that the total number of words in the chart is more than 31 is explained in diagram number 5, showing that some words are applied more than once in the text.
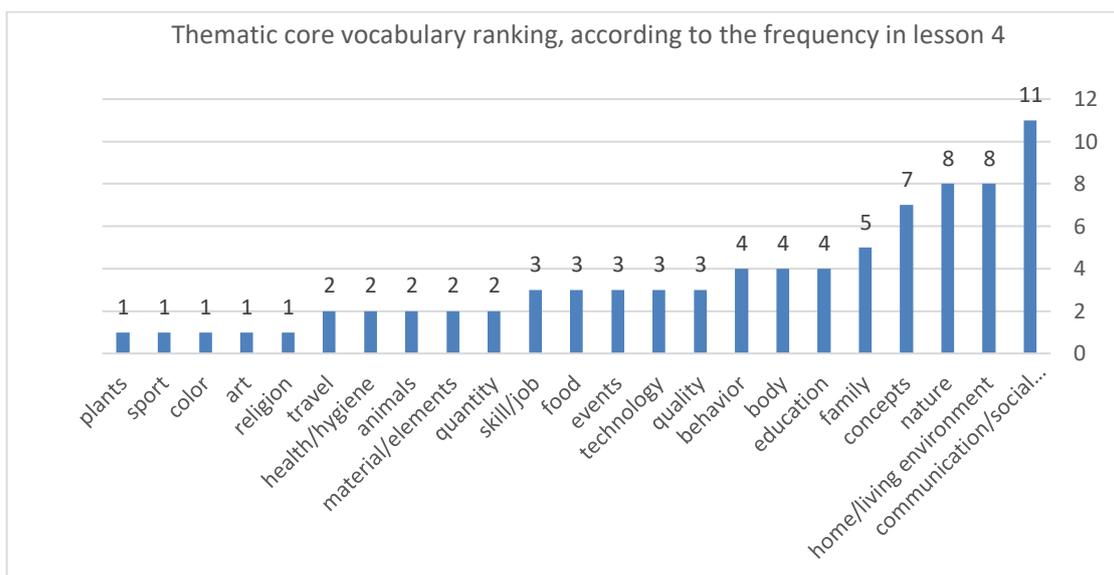

Figure 4. Thematic Gradation.

Discussion

New Persian Language teaching curriculum in the elementary schools

After many types of research and reviews by the Persian language and literature department in the textbook authoring committee, the new elementary school curriculum was approved in 2006 by the Iranian Curriculum Studies Association. In the new Persian textbooks, the focus on vocabulary had been augmented. One of the criticisms about the old books was the uneven distribution of vocabulary in the textbooks. Also, the words were unfamiliar to the child's world and the lack of alive and joyful vocabulary was obvious (Ne'matzadeh,2010:8). Elementary teachers had many times declared that the old books were not suitable for Persian language learning. One part of this problem was related to the application of inadequate vocabulary. Amongst the main problems some were:

- The application of the words that students did not know them, for example: "lantern".
- Sometimes for one concept there was more than one word.
- The words were not presented in their lexical cluster; for example: "brother" was not introduced beside "mother, father, and sister".
- The initiative and target words necessary for beginners were not taught first; for example: "cat" and "dog" were taught after "awl".
- The cultural and local considerations were not noticed
- There was not enough diversity and repetition for learning the new words.
(Nabifar, 2016:173-174).

Core Vocabulary

Core vocabularies are the most frequent and familiar words in Iranian children in their daily life. These vocabularies are used all around Iran by children of any language, ethnicity, and culture. All Iranian children are familiar with these vocabularies and use them in their life. The core vocabulary is the linguistic device for children in order to communicate with the world around them in their city or village, at home or school. If the adults apply the children's core vocabularies while dealing with them, the outcome would be more convincing (Ne'matzadeh et al, 2011:38).

Pointing out one of the core vocabularies characteristics, it could be said that they are the most used words in the speaking and the writing version; accordingly, they can be retrieved more quickly from the memory (Alavi, Kheyrabadi, 2014:141). If the purpose of education is the second language teaching and/or a specific field of study (for example teenager literature genre), then the core vocabularies should be studies based on the most frequent vocabularies

in the target field. The estimation of the core vocabulary in each field of language learning could lead to better educational content production (Ramezani; Assadpour,2016:176).

The core vocabulary along with the marginal vocabulary is necessary for teaching the new (target) words in each lesson (Ne'matzadeh,2010:15-18). If the core vocabulary is for communicative and social purposes, then it is "general core vocabulary". In case the target is educational, it is entitled "educational core vocabulary" (McCarthy; Carter, 2003:6).

Core Vocabulary Thematic Categorization

The core vocabulary in elementary school is divided into 24 thematic sections. Some words are common in two or more sections. For example, although "hair" is under the "body" section, it is also mentioned in "clothing/make-up", "color" and "health/hygiene" categories. Another example is the word "mother", belonging thematically to three groups of family, social relation/communication, and education.

The subjects include: body; clothing/make-up; education; animals; family; home/the living environment; food; religion/ethics; social relations; events; behavior; colors; health/hygiene; transportation; nature; skills/work; quality; quantity; plants; concepts; materials/elements; sport/play/hobby; art/literature; tool/technology. The last subject, containing 142 words, has the first rank.

The semantic field plays an important role in categorizing the words and in the child's comprehension of the text. For example, some adjectives could have various meanings, according to the context. For example: hot, right, sweet (Azari, 2021:8-9).

In addition to the thematic categories, there is a vocabulary gradation list in which the core vocabularies are divided into four steps. In each of the elementary Farsi reading books, the core vocabularies are divided into four steps or quarters. The educational content in the first quarter of each book must contain only the core vocabularies of the first step. The second quarter of Farsi elementary books should just use the core vocabularies of the first and second steps. The author should not apply core vocabulary from the 3rd and/or the 4th quarter in the lesson. Only in the last quarter of the book, the author can use all the core vocabularies of the grade he is producing the educational content. Apparently, the author can apply all the core vocabularies of the previous elementary grades. In the fifth elementary school grade, the four steps of the core vocabularies, totally consist of 497 words. Respectively, 1st quarter: 127 words; 2nd quarter: 128 words; 3rd quarter: 139 words; 4th quarter: 103 words

(Ne'matzadeh,2010:46-47). In diagram No.4 the number of core vocabularies in each quarter is shown.
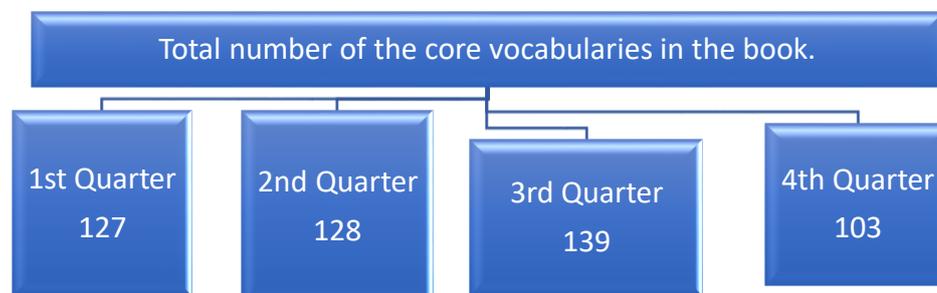

Figure 5. Number of the core vocabularies based on the quarters in the 5th-grade elementary Persian textbook

The fifth-grade Farsi elementary textbook contains 132 pages. Dividing the book into four quarters shows that "the businessman and his children" lesson is located in the second quarter of the book. The text is on 2 pages with 28 lines totally. On average, with each line having 14-16 words, the total number of the words was 357[1], including adverbs, prepositions, coordinating and subordinating conjunctions ,and different kinds of pronouns. The grammatical function of the words was determined based on the syntax and the structure of the sentences. Nouns with 77, verbs with 36, and adjectives[2] with 26 words in the text were totally 139 in number.

The nouns that were applied in the text more than once: child[3] (7), thing (5), life (4), people (3), asset (belongings) (3), future (2), father (2), human (2), effort (2), soil (2), virtue (2), type (form) (2). Some of these nouns were chosen from core vocabularies. In order to show the child's world concept, it is interesting to point out that "day", "night" and morning are considered in the elementary school core vocabulary but "year" does not exist in this group (Azari, 2021:5).

The structure of the verbs was either simple or with a verbal prefix, the combination of a noun + verb (compound), or phrasal-prepositional. Without considering the frequency of the verbs' application in the text, there were 16 simple verbs, 2 verbs with a prefix, and 14 verbs

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[1] some words were applied more than once in the text. Number 357 is for the word counting without frequency.
[2] Indefinite adjectives and the numerical ones were not considered.
[3] *"farznd"* is a literary word and was applied 7 times. From the core vocabulary list, "bačē" as a synonym of the previous word was applied once.

made by the combination of a noun and a verb (compound). Also, 3 phrasal-prepositional verbs[4] were located in the text. One impersonal verb[5] (according to Vahidiyan, 2016:26) existed in the lesson. Except for the verb "to want" which is semantically conceptual, the rest of the verbs were conative/active.

The most core vocabularies applied in the text were from the second quarter which matched with the location of the lesson in the textbook. Although the author should write the text in a way that complies with the present or previous taught quarters, in this lesson, there were 7 core vocabularies from the third quarter and 2 core vocabularies from the fourth quarter. Diagram number 5 indicates the core vocabulary based on the quarter they belong to. The numbers inside brackets are the frequency of their application.
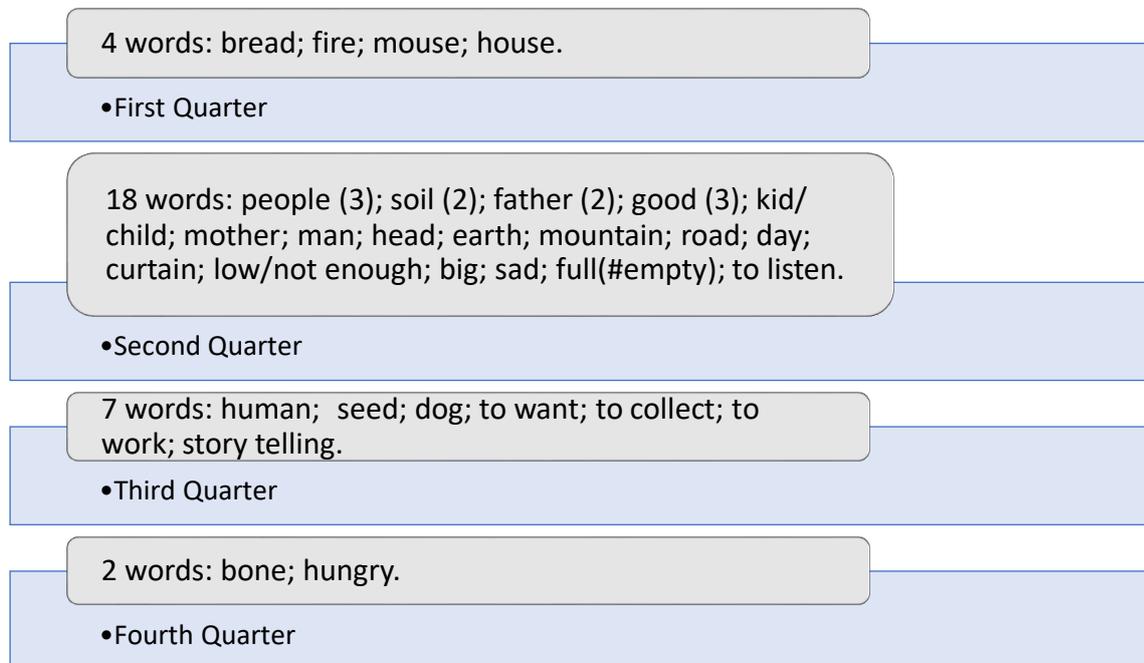
4 words: bread; fire; mouse; house.

•First Quarter

18 words: people (3); soil (2); father (2); good (3); kid/child; mother; man; head; earth; mountain; road; day; curtain; low/not enough; big; sad; full(#empty); to listen.

•Second Quarter

7 words: human; seed; dog; to want; to collect; to work; story telling.

•Third Quarter

2 words: bone; hungry.

•Fourth Quarter

Figure 6. The core vocabulary gradation, applied in lesson 4 of the 5th-grade elementary Farsi textbook.

The non-Persian/loan words in Persian core vocabulary

One of the characteristics of a living language with speakers is borrowing words from other languages and lending them to other ones. Historical events, the appearance of new

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[4] "be dast āvardan" (to achieve), "bar jāy māndan" (to stay), "be kār gereftan" (to apply).

[5] "dēlam mīxāhad" (I want).

religions and sects, the foundation of philosophical schools, along scientific developments, all have had influences on different aspects of the Persian language. Through millenniums and centuries, new words and formations have entered to Persian lexis, and some have lost their function and were obsolescent. Not only some words experienced a broadening of meaning and accepted new meanings according to the current social, political, technical needs of their era, but also many loan words were borrowed from other languages (Abolghassemi, 2019:85).

The Arabic language is one of the languages having a vast influence on the Persian language, because of historical and religious reasons. Many Arabic words have faced semantic changes and accepted new meanings in order to respond to the fast social evolutions (Alsuh; Taheri,2018:124). In addition to Arabic, Turkish is one of the languages having numerous loanwords being entered into the classical Persian texts and poems. Contemporary Persian has many Turkish nouns (generic or proper) and also, Turkish-Persian compounds (Aydenloo,2017:11). The invasion of Genghis Khan and two centuries of Mongolian dynasties' domination in Iran show their traces on the Persian language at present time (Bagheri,1999:39). In the Qajar era, by the establishment of Dār-ol Fonoun school and Nasseri translation institute, many French words influenced the Persian language (Khosrobeigui; Feyzi:2012:126).

Eventually, the loanwords exist in the Persian core vocabulary. In this study, 4 of the 31 core vocabularies were completely or partially Arabic. An adjective was formed by the combination of a Persian prefix with an Arabic word. Two verbs were formed by the combination of Arabic words and Persian auxiliary verbs.

- Noun: *''ensān'* (human): 2 times in the text.
- Adjective: *'nārāhat'* (sad); etymology: *'nā-'*(Persian negative maker prefix) + *'rāhat'* (relax/happy).
- Verb: *'Jam' kardan'* (to collect).
- Verb: '*γessə goftan'* (to tell a story).

Here are some other loanwords applied more than once in the text (not in the core vocabulary category):

Turkish: *'talāš'* (endeavor/effort): It was applied 6 times in the text: 2 times as a noun and 4 times as verb, in combination with a Persian auxiliary verb: *'talāš kardan'* (to try).

Arabic: *'māl'* (belongings/money): 3 times as noun.

Arabic: *'fazilat'* (virtue): 2 times as noun.

CONCLUSION

1. This research proved that the authors had considered the application of core vocabulary in re-writing the simplified form of one of Kalila & Demna's fables in the 5th Farsi elementary reading book. The analysis showed that in almost 71 percent (70.96) of the cases the words were chosen based on quarter 2 which is the location of lesson 4 in the 5th grade Farsi reading elementary textbook.

2. From the grammatical point of view, most words were nouns: 22 nouns, 6 adjectives, and 4 verbs. This result with a cognitive approach could lead to the fact that in the child's conceptual world, a noun is easier to learn compared to the adjective and/or verb.

3. The results showed that the most themes in the core vocabulary applied in this content analysis, were social relation/communication, family, home/living environment, nature, and concepts. The least subjects mentioned in the lesson were religion, art, color, sport, and plants.

4. The loanwords, mostly Arabic, exist in Iranian children's core vocabulary. In the present analysis, four Arabic words were in the list. ''insān' (human) was applied twice in the text. One adjective ('nārāhat' = sad) and two verbs ('jam' kardan' = to collect & 'γessə goftan'= to tell a story), originally Arabic, were used in compound forms with Persian suffix and Persian auxiliary verbs. understand.

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