

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND CURRICULUM: DESIGNING EFFECTIVE MATERIALS FOR TEACHING UYGHUR

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What are the best resources for learning a language? Many cite interaction with native speakers, media, and apps like Duolingo or Anki. While valuable, these tools are best complemented by comprehensive textbooks, which provide the structure and depth essential for mastering less-commonly taught languages. Textbooks designed with authentic materials and cultural context play a pivotal role in language learning, especially when we talk about less commonly taught languages.

When I began teaching Uyghur at Indiana University in 2005, no textbooks were available. To fill this gap, I created handouts with visuals, cultural artifacts, and songs. However, students expressed the need for a structured curriculum, prompting the development of tailored textbooks for various proficiency levels.

With the support of the Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR) at Indiana University, we developed tailored Uyghur teaching materials. This effort led to the publication of the Elementary Uyghur Textbook in 2013 and the Intermediate Uyghur Textbook in 2016 by Georgetown University Press. These textbooks employ a communicative approach combined with contemporary innovations in foreign language teaching. They incorporate photographs, videos, real-life scenarios, cultural notes, and proverbs, immersing students in both the language and culture. Used worldwide, including at Harvard University, these resources provide a learning experience that closely mirrors visiting the Uyghur region.

The growing demand for advanced proficiency led to the creation of the Advanced Uyghur Textbook, which we started to develop in collaboration with Gulnar Eziz from Harvard University. This resource will equip students with specialized skills for academic research and meaningful engagement with the Uyghur-speaking community.

This presentation explores the principles behind these materials, the challenges of developing resources for less-commonly taught languages, and insights gained from creating an advanced-level textbook.