

Iran and Postcolonialism: The Case of ELT

Ehsan Mehri¹

Abstract

This study takes a postcolonial approach towards second language education in general, and English language teaching as a second/foreign language in particular. It discusses the essences of linguistic imperialism, and goes through the historical, political, ideological, sociocultural, and educational bases of such a discourse. However, it is narrowed down in terms of applied linguistics in TESOL studies. It traces the evidence for such a discourse throughout the world, and then turns to the case of Iran for claiming that Iran, as a postcolonial state has not been unaffected as well.

Keywords: Postcolonialism; linguistic imperialism; ELT; Iran; education.

¹ Applied Linguistics, TEFL, Tehran, Iran, Email: ehsan.mehri.work@gmail.com

Linguistic Imperialism

The employment of language as a source of power is intricately investigated through the concept of linguistic imperialism (Philipson, 2009). It is "an overarching structure of asymmetrical, unequal exchange, where language dominance dovetails with economic, political, and other types of dominance. It entails unequal resource allocation and communicative rights between people defined in terms of their competence" (p. 2). This form of imperialism stands on five main principles which are all refuted in Philipson (1992). He believes that all the five tenets, namely the teaching of English monolignually, native speakerism, the earlier the better, the more English the better, and lowering the status of other non-English languages, are all non-scientifically advertised and supported indirectly by English materials and centers.

This is not a simple variable, as, in the case of education, many English speaking countries try to attract foreign students on the condition that they provide their competence in English through measurement systems such as IELTS and TOEFL. This, in turn, has economic value as well. Philipson (ibid) maintains that the British economic benefits from English language productions of nearly 11 billion euros and even 12 billion indirectly through the British council. So, it is a big commodity to sell to the world as it is the case for oil, not only the case of productions such as textbooks and materials, or the measurement systems and standards, there is even the global advertisement of the correct form of communication, to enforce the

appropriate manner of showing acceptable communicative competence. This form of adherence to correctness is what tempted Cameron (2002) to suggest the idea of communicative imperialism.

In his detailed, historical analysis of the path of English expansion worldwide, Philipson (1992) draws on the structural theory of Galtung (1971) in that the world is divided into periphery and center countries. Phillipson also considers its assumption to suggest that not only colonialism and the expansion of Western imperialism's thought and ideology supported the expansion of English language, but also that the permeation of the language pinned certain assumptions about the colonizing world. This is because technologically, the colonizing world seemed to be ahead of the rest of the world, as it is profoundly sketched in Hoffman (2015) following the political history of Europe, so it was assumed that having access to the language of the source of knowledge of this colonizing world can accelerate the path of development and prosperity for the poorer, periphery and colonized world. This attitude toward language learning and the status of English becoming prominent through the images of a better future (economically, culturally, politically, and socially) was not only supported by the center countries but also reappeared in and embraced by the colonized world to a large extent. The native language of the periphery country was not very much encouraged and the English language was promoted for most, if not all parts, and particularly for the elite of the society, those who made important decisions for the prospect of the country.

Although Philipson (1992) traces such an applied linguistic approach in the context of India and particularly the expansion of the British Council's activity worldwide, it should be noted that the basic themes of this 'linguistic imperialism' additionally permeated into public newspapers such as *Guardian Weekly*, (May 20, 1984, cited in Philipson, 1992) indicating that 'there is no corner of the world so remote, no nation so insignificant, that it does not represent a vital interest of the United States', to shoot out the idea of the superior language and image of the developed country. This imperialistic view is not limited to the journalistic community but is also evident previously in the ELT community, as there seem to be several concerns for the expansion of ELT and English language status. For example, Widdowson (1968) criticizes the British Council's policy of English schemes and plans for India, indicating that it seriously can bring along linguistic and cultural genocide. Rogers (1982) is concerned about the illusionary expectation that the development of image can bring via the acquisition of English. Hayes (1983) focuses on textbook writing of the center countries and mentions the irrelevance of the content of the instructional books for the other ESL/EFL contexts. The practice of ELT as directed by the center countries' experts and the attitude it carries with the other affiliated communities to the teaching of English is nicely put by Philipson (1992) in the following quote:

Anglo-centricity and professionalism legitimate English as the dominant language by rationalizing activities and beliefs which contribute to the structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. The professional discourse around ELT *disconnects* culture from structure by limiting the focus in language pedagogy to technical matters, that is, language and education in a narrow sense, to the exclusion of social, economic and, political matters. (p. 48) (Italics in original)

This highlights the economic status of the language teaching practice and attaches to the language expansion both a political and, more importantly, economic motive. This ELT movement is not limited to the activity of institutions of the kind, such as the British Council, but also to the techniques and methods as well as the theories constructed by the Western academic community. This is interestingly pointed out by Howatt (1984) in his genealogy of the methods of language teaching, concluding that in general, the field of ELT has kept its 'ethnocentric' nature, in that most of what we currently take for granted as the knowledge of language teaching was born from Europe as the mother of the teaching practice, despite the fact that much of the raw materials of the theories were taken from the other periphery countries.

Pennycook (1998), similarly, traces the discourse of colonialism and the impact of the English language. Although most of the direct effort for changing the mind and the souls of the 'other' (a concept of rather much debate) into English has been erased from the recent documents of the linguistic policies of West, the legacies are still with

us. The capitalistic economy, chewing the world voraciously, only replaces the direct colonization of the world. This, poured in language-related discussions, means that 'the linguistic ideas that evolved at the accrue of empires led by Britain and the United States have not changed as economic colonialism has replaced the directly political management of the third world nations. English is still believed to be the inevitable world language' (Bailey, 1991, p. 121).

The current condition of English language has not taken shape overnight. There is a long tradition of political and cultural activity behind this fact that learning of English has become an imperative for most people of the world. The British cultural center, The British Council, can give meaningful insights into this. For example, it estimates 115 million learners in the 1970s (British et al., 1989). This could not happen without British and American imperialism most notably in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, and the modern form after the Second World War through America in the 20th century. The English language is invested with center English speaking countries (England, America, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia) producing loads of textbooks and educating thousands of teachers. This follows American's interest in that the more English is used on the world stage, the better it is. The United States political aims parallel English expansion as telecommunication, standards, and all could be Americanized (Rothkopf, 1997). Crystal (1997) believes that English has permeated all commercial, political, and socio-economic aspects of people's lives in a way that if the current periphery countries, which

cannot play a key economic and political role on the world's stage, have to learn English in order to have an agentive role for responding and/or resisting the hegemonic power of the language and/or Western imperialism. There are factors to shape such a situation, though. Philipson (2009) suggested this to happen at the structural and ideological levels. As far as the structural level is concerned, the popularity and spread of the English language resulted from the ties between globalization and English, Britain and America's investment in the language, higher education powers of English speaking countries, setting standards for its acquisition, lack of multilingualism at the business and educational levels, weak language policies, and the surrender of the poor countries immigrants to adhere to the English learning standards of the English speaking nations. As far as the ideological aspect is concerned, European nations have not a common conception of language policy, they do not support multilingualism, the support of the media, and economic spheres.

Postcolonialism and English Language

Concerning postcolonial studies, English is constantly marketed to be the language of "international communication and understanding. Economic development, national unity, and similar positive ascriptions" (Philipson, 2009, p. 41). Despite the fact that the language is not controlled and suggested to be owned by one particular part of the world, it is, however, employed in the world united organizations where the use of English plays a key role. Note that those who are part

of the world bank, world trade organization, NATO, united nations, and so are at an advantage to speak and know English.

Even those areas of linguistic investigation that concern a global convergence such as lingua franca and intercultural competence are to a large extent value-laden. It is a fallacy to assume that the spread of language and its intercultural communication is a neutral activity. As it is noted by Kramsch (2002), the idea is to be largely ideological since it is backed by the Anglo-Saxon style of English discourse and its targeted norm. People from the periphery countries cry out such as distinction attitude toward these seemingly neutral norms. For example, Dendrinos (1999, as cited in Philipson, 2007) indicates that in Greece, the teachers evaluate their competence based on the extent they can get near the native speakers' competence, or the assumption is that they can behave and teach cultural appropriate manners of speaking and norms. In a similar link, Kontra (1997) maintains that the production of the English language teaching materials pushes the learners and the teachers towards a norm advertised by the United Kingdom and the United States. This is in contrast with the advice of the professionals who are trying to empower the non-native speaker, and this can situate them in a form of 'schizophrenic' status where they do not know how to orient their professionalism. It is true that there are general supports for the non-ownership of the English language by certain societies, however, one cannot ignore the reality as to what aims and goals it is put into practice. Furthermore, there is firm evidence as to the fact that learners try to identify themselves with an

imagined community of practice and social prestige when they are learning English.

Learning English brings with it a discourse of democracy and neoliberalism. This is much backed by the United States and the United Kingdom the means of which is much appreciated by the British council since its establishment in 1935. It is not hidden from anyone that the British council aims to promote British culture and tries to export the reconstruction of democracy to other countries (Borjian, 2013). On the American side, the TOEFL center into export the English language in its American version to the world. Philipson (2009) analyses the TOEFL missions noting that the center at Princeton University "goes far beyond testing ... products and services enable opportunity worldwide by measuring knowledge and skills, promoting learning and performance, and supporting education and professional development for all people worldwide" (p. 112). In general, it seems that there is a collaboration between the two nations which hold the major English native speakers of the world in order to establish a source of English production and expansion though not in the direct colonial sense, but more cultural. Since the end of the Second World War, there has been a constant support for the expansion of English by the American imperial attitude. Inspired by the Thatcherism and Reaganism of the 70s and 80s political agenda, and also noted by political figures explicitly, i.e. Churchill, English is a cultural gain with political consequences for the British and American political and economic gains. Learning English is correlated

with Anglosphere values which are indicated to be universal, thus universalizing the English language norm of speaking. This is because it is envisioned that those who are speaking the English language are valuing "individualism, rule of law, honoring of covenants ... and the emphasis on freedom as a political and cultural value" (ibid, p120). This neoliberal attitude is what was advertised in the neoimperial attitude of Thatcherism and later manifested in cultural globalization. But as noted previously the type of globalization imagined is the English type supported by major English enterprises and academic centers. It would be naïve to think that this economically beneficial source of income for the English speaking countries would let them forget about equal respect for other languages, and even de-emphasizing the spread of language. The statistics of the income and savings gained by the spread and keeping the status quo speaks for themselves. It is estimated that the UK and Ireland gain more than 10 billion Euros per year from production of English language teaching materials and this could expand to 16 billion euros for other related English services, such as testing, and teacher training, among others. On the American side, the figure shows that that the government can save up to 19 billion dollars given that the English language keeps its empowering status (ibid). The neoliberal paradigm of political leadership is not a delusion but an actuality, as it is explicitly sound. This globalization which connects all the nations inevitably indicates that they have no other alternative but to come to the circles of the

world's nations and that means the Britishness and Americanization of the world. Tony Blair expresses this soundly:

Globalization begets interdependence, and interdependence begets the necessity of a common value system. History is... the age-old battle between progress and reaction, between those who embrace the modern world and those who reject its existence. Century upon century it has been the destiny of Britain to lead other nations. That should not be a destiny that is part of our history. It should be part of our future. We are a leader of nations or nothing.

Despite the fact that America has no official language, the major language of current affairs is also English. Within the same line, it is boldly noted that the English language is connected with improvement, progress, academic achievement, occupational success, money, and prosperity (Greenwood, 2003, cited in Crystal, 2003). The researcher shows that science is believed inherently to be spread and developed by English and English textbooks are attractive and signs of development for the learners and future students of the academic centers. These advertisements and supports at the political and economic levels have shown their consequences in many nations. For example, the case of Singapore reveals that even after its independence, the English language has not changed its firmed status among people, it is the language of domestic and foreign affairs, it is used at almost all educational levels, and the country is known by its major use of English at the expense of local languages. This is similarly true for Pakistan, where major elites and educated sectors of

the population are concerned about learning English. Among the linguistic experts, Halliday (2006, as cited in Kachru et al., 2013) shows the idea of postcolonial English in nice wording:

English has become a world language in both [sic] sense of the term, international and global: international as a medium of literary and other forms of cultural life in (mainly) countries of the former British Empire; global, as the co-genitor of the new technological age... English has been expanding along both trajectories: globally, as English; internationally, as Englishes ... International English has expanded by becoming world Englishes, evolving so as to adapt to the meanings of other cultures. Global English has expanded ... by taking over, or being taken over by ... all the other forms of political and commercial propaganda (p. 335)

It goes without saying that the spread of English could not happen without British effort in the pre-second world war and its aftermath. It is generally known as cultural propaganda, through giving development aids and commodities to other nations in order to establish a correlation between the English language teaching and the "good thing" concept among others. British council was fundamentally corroborating with Ford and Rockefeller foundations (Pennycook, 1994). Primarily it was founded to combat the spread of fascism in Europe, but mostly aimed at cultural activities. British council's objectives were to promote the culture and language of Britain, its art, and literature and contribution to science, and philosophy and political thought. However, there was a serious

argument that the ministry of information should be involved in the board of the council. But since it would send a negative message to the world that there was a political hand in this cultural institution, it was taken off the table. So the golden egg of the council was thought to be the expansion of the English language (ibid). There was close contact with American counterparts, which resulted in the publication of the English Language Teaching journal in 1953, which is one of the leading research and practice journals in the world. Although both nations emphasize the significance and fixation of their major language, Pennycook (ibid) believes that there is a difference between their approaches. While the British side is somehow dangling between the pre-imperialistic attitudes and post-colonial conditions, the American approach is to correlate the language with concepts popular in the world as democracy, development, capitalism, modernization, and education.

ELT and Linguistic Imperialism

The Western approach is very much popularized in the ELT industry. The publication of Language teaching materials is filled with English lifestyles which advertises their worldview and attitudes towards life. This happens at the expense of the locals. As noted by Gulalp (1995) this general attitude toward westernization has three major problems in the first case, it is assumed that everything that comes from the West is more advanced in comparison with the local ones. This gives a sense of superiority, particularly to English materials. The second place, the methodology of the local societies is assumed to be old-

fashioned and backward, but those introduced are fashionable and effective. Finally, there is a general sense those products (theories, methods, and materials) that are generated by the West are not value-laden and ideologically sound, but rather neutral. But as noted previously, this is a big industry which gives economic, political, and cultural advantages to the West. In relation to the materials, Candlin (1984) soundly mentions that a syllabus is not "an ordered sequence of selected items content, it reveals itself as a window on a particular set of social, educational, moral and subject matter values. Syllabuses are seen in this perspective stand, then, for particular *ideologies*" (p. 129).

In the case of language teaching methodology, it becomes self-evident that the audiolingual methods and the communicative approach highly support the monolingualism of the English language within the classroom environment for both instruction and practice (Richards and Rogers, 2014). This is happening in the case of teaching functions where the in/formality, politeness, in/directness, etc. Issues of teaching functions of language are tuned in according to the native speakers' value and judgment. When it comes to analyzing communicative language teaching, it becomes evident that speech is primary to the written and other skills, and even the case of communicative imperialism notes that the patterns of communication have to be in accordance to the native speakers. The activities, even for achieving communicative competence are merely based on the trivial needs of the learners, so it would not give them much empowering command of the target language. So, learners have not

much time to evaluate the cultural side of learning a language. When it comes to the student-centered ideology, it could be taken as the oppression and control of the learner in another guise, since the learner is taken as a product than a discovered (Candlin, 1984).

In terms of international textbooks, it should be mentioned that the ELT industry suffers from ignorance and indifference toward locally produced materials. As indicated by Brown (1990) it is a naïve conception that there can be a global culture represented in the textbooks, while the ones produced and advertised by the Western (British and American) ELT materials are hugely popularizing their values, most notably the ones propagated by the neoliberal ideology. In other words, it is shaping a discourse of language learning and teaching which is particularized with the Western conception. Pennycook (1994) focuses on the details of the ELT industry claiming that:

Teaching practices, techniques, approaches, and methods are cultural practices that occur within specific discourses and imply particular understandings of language, teacher and student roles of the importance of ...speaking in class, what are desirable topics for speech, the importance of structures or functions, or reading practices, what constitutes well written text, learning as a fun activity, education as learner—centered as opposed to teacher-centered... or the importance of authentic texts and activities, motivation as an autonomous subject's desire to speak... Or correctness being less important than a will to speak... (p .178).

This means that learning English cannot currently be separated from the westernization of the outcomes. Despite the serious efforts put into internalizing the language and writing back to the power, there are forces on the Western materials development which try to give some carrots to the others while pushing them and enforcing their conception with a mild stick. But this does not mean surrendering to the forces of the English, as noted in the section on resistance. Language is a site of struggle (1994) and by this means, writing and producing local textbooks and writing, as well as a particular variety of English could empower the non-English speaking learners of English to respond. To argue deeper, it is not only the idea of a new variety of English only but rather a "battle around culture, knowledge, and inequality" (Pennycook, 1994, p. 269). It is actually to break down the fixated dualities or primitive/modern, old/new, civilized/uncivilized, religious/secular, among others.

Within such a perspective, one needs to heed that it is not only a matter of teaching the language or being successful in giving learned students, but actually, it is a process of identification and socio-cultural practice. The postcolonial condition is a means of responding to the sources of power, those countries which have large amounts of resources and academic advantages to enforce their materials. Postcolonialism, then, is a means of voicing the voice of the other (Giroux, 1991). Giroux tries to encapsulate such an empowering discourse through critical pedagogy, which is to some extent tied with the postcolonial condition. It could be a critical device which Giroux

terms 9 criteria, some of which will be noted here. This approach can happen at all levels of language investigation in theoretical and practical terms. First of all, the learners should not merely be assumed as receivers of knowledge and competent speakers of the target language, particularly English in which the learners might be consummated by the general ideology and cultural values, but actually they have to be empowered by as conscious political individuals. Secondly, both teachers and learners need to be aware of the ethics they need to adhere to, which leads to the third criterion indicating that the differences and identities of the learners and teachers need to be appreciated. Thirdly, the materials are not sacred texts, but sites of discussion and understanding of different forms of culture and knowledge. Fourthly, knowledge is to be newly and constantly created and recreated in order to keep an open mind for the other forms of socio-cultural values. Fifthly, those values of westernization such as individualism, reasoning, and universalities of Western values need to be cautiously evaluated and analyzed. In the two next criteria, learners need to be in struggle with better conditions in the world, and change their status quo, in order to be active members of the world community when they learn English. Lastly, the learners need to voice their concerns and thoughts, not merely adhere to what is presented to them through the language and the materials. This is a serious matter because learners and teachers are not merely servants of the language, but as it is generally assumed in linguistics, the language is a means of expressing thought and establishing identities. The dangers are to be

noted, which is nice, though a long quotation, put by Ngugi (1993, p. 39):

Let us be clear that the English language has been a monumental force and institution of oppression and rabid exploration throughout 400 years of imperialist history. It attached the black person who spoke it with its racist images and imperialist message, it battered the worker who toiled as its words expressed the parameter of his misery and the subjection of entire peoples in all the continents of the world. It was made to scorn the languages it sought to replace, and told the colonized peoples that mimicry of its primacy among languages was necessary...thus, when we talk of 'mastery' of the standard language, we must be conscious of the terrible irony of the word, that the English language itself was the language of the master, the carrier of his arrogance and brutality. Yet, as teachers, we seek to grasp that same language and give it new content, to de-colonize its words, to de-mystify its meaning, and as workers taking over our own factory and giving our machines new lives, making it a vehicle for liberation, consciousness, and love, to rip out its class assumptions, its racism, and appalling degradation of women, to make it truly common, to recreate it as a weapon for the freedom and understanding of our people.

This is in line with Ngugi's conception of decolonizing the mind, though how it could happen is a question that needs to be experimentally investigated, since it requires a firm and rich discourse to counter the homogenizing, imperialistic, ignoring discourse of the Western English empowering discourse.

Globalization and TESOL

Kumaravadivelu (2006) discusses the dangers that the liaison between globalization, empire, and TESOL can have for the language teaching community in detail. Assuming that the current condition of the world is redefined by globalization and a new imperialism, he sketches three major waves of globalization. The first one occurred when the classic imperialists such as Spain and Portugal tried to exploit Asian resources, such as India and China. The second wave occurred in the 19th century through the industrial revolution, and the third wave came into being after the Second World War through American's institutions of enforcing power, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Center, and the International Monetary Fund. The globalization of today is largely highlighted through internet usage as it brings 'shrinking space, shrinking time, and disappearing borders. Not only at the political and economic level, but also the cultural level globalization tries to enforce the westernization, or Americanization of the world culture through homogenizing the societies. Accepting notions of new imperialism as indicated by Harvey (2019) and Hardt and Negri (2019), Kumaravadivelu (2006) believes that the education of English is the instillation of imperialism and makes the ling the English language industry through scholastic, linguistic, cultural, and economic dimensions:

The scholastic dimension of English relates to the ways in which western scholars have furthered their own vested interests by disseminating western knowledge and by

denigrating local knowledge. The linguistic dimension pertains to the ways in which the knowledge and use of local language(s) were made irrelevant for learning and teaching English as an additional language. The cultural dimension integrates the teaching of the English language with the teaching of western culture with the view to developing the L2 learners' cultural empathy towards the target language community...economic dimension adds jobs and wealth to the economy of English-speaking countries through a worldwide ELT industry (p. 14).

In other words, the production of knowledge, the avoidance of using L1, western cultural behavior, and the promise of economic success are all within the actual spread of the ELT industry. In the language teaching textbook production, this means that the global textbooks take into account the local users and even the local production of the English textbooks needs to have a model to follow after. The diversity seems to be encouraged, but with a modeling of the Western centrality. Even, those textbooks which seem to rely so much on intercultural communication treat Western cultural behavior as the norm (Cameron, 2002). Therefore, the pedagogically-correct manner of textbook production, teaching, and learning is largely determined by the native English speaking countries that are trying to support the spread and establishment of the English language. Cameron concludes that we "know of no case in which the communicative norms of a non-Western, or indeed non-Anglophone society have been exported by expert consultants" (p. 70), which

shows the prejudice and bias which are both encouraged in the global and local textbooks.

Iran: The Condition of Postcolonialism and ELT

Iran has been a challenging case of acceptance and rejection of modernity. There is a serious history of conflict between modernity and tradition since the early contact of our elites with the Western's paradigm of modernism. However, since the Constitutional Revolution, most of the key elite figures and policymakers primarily aimed to be self-reliant and independent. Either relying on Iranianism or Islamism (see Boroujerdi, 2013 for a review on Iranian key intellectuals), much attempt was pursued by both the Pahlavi and Islamic regimes to be self-reliant. This is particularly evident in the political philosophy and mottos of post-revolutionary Iran. Borjian (2013) puts this point in a nutshell:

The goal was to craft an indigenized, localized, and homegrown model of 'development' – a model in which development was no longer perceived as the 'linear stages' of economic growth, through which all nations had to pass fairly linearly to follow the already proven path of the 'developed' nations in order to achieve 'development'. Rather, the revolutionary aspiration was to break away from western-driven conventional wisdom and grand narratives *to propose a new model for progress and growth, along the lines of the Islamic doctrine...* the grand revolutionary motto of the time, was to be an Islamic republic 'self-sufficient' (kod-kafa) from the West and the East (na sharqi, na gharbi) (pp. 2-3) (Italics mine).

One of the components of Western ideology was its much advertised and popular language of the time: English. This did not mean that the language should be rejected at all costs but rather could it be embraced and bent toward the goals. It was actually a way to break the Western hegemony through speaking the Islamic 'truths' back to them via their own language. Borjian (2013) claims that Western names such as "Jack, Joe, John, and Mary" were removed from the post-revolutionary English language teaching textbooks, but it is a conjecture that has to be tested out.

The History of English language teaching in Iran could be traced back to the Qajar dynasty. Despite the fact that for 5 centuries Farsi dominated the region (from the 14th to the 19th) century in areas expanding from Turkey to India, it was replaced with English following the establishment of the British council at the peak of its imperialism in the 19th century (Borjian and Borjian, 2011). This was mostly accomplished through missionaries and non-Muslim schools in north Western areas and scattered marginally through the country. But it should be noted that the dominance was still with the French, as most of the elites and intellectuals of the time targeted French scientific institutions for their further studies (see Safavi, 2004). On the American side, Mansoori (1986) has given a historical description of the American presence in Iran tracing the first school back to Perkin in 1836. Despite its limited activity in Urmia, American missionaries opened the first college in 1878 in the same town. French schools were prevalent throughout the late 19th and early 20th century,

but the Pahlavi Dynasty gradually oriented toward Americanism and Englishness (ibid). British Council, however, was a cultural institution to advertise the British style and way of life. Established in 1934, its first representative house was opened in Iran in 1955 (Borjian, 2013). But as Iranian's general policy was more oriented toward the U.S. in the cold war, more bonds and funds were imported within the socio-cultural and economic spheres of the country, a famous cultural example of which was the establishment of the Iran-America cultural society following the Fulbright commission (ibid). This was represented in language institutes and higher education, the former through Kanoon Zaban and Shokouh language institutes (both active in post-revolutionary), and Shiraz and Ferdowsi Mashhad Universities which were built according to Pennsylvania and Georgetown universities, respectively (Borjian, 2013)

As far as language-related textbooks are concerned, Ziahosseiny (2005) claims that the ministry of education ordered an American author to write a textbook. He further, confirms that the University of Mashhad gave language lessons from American and British lecturers. At the university level, Yarmohammadi (2005) indicates that the materials at Shiraz University were introduced by applied linguistics from America (Pennsylvania university in particular) who, in addition, programmed the placement tests, and intensive courses for all the university students (this was happening in the pre-revolutionary era). In the case of teacher training centers, Tarbiat Modarres University

followed the University of California's program of teacher education which was in line with the American program (Borjian, 2013).

The early heydays of post-revolutionary Iran were seriously encapsulated by the rejection of the West. To firmly establish their independence, the policymakers tried to purify any traces of West (as was previously highlighted by Fardid and Al-Ahmad, noted by Boroujerdi, 2013). Mostly, it was claimed (Boroujerdi, 2013) that the people of Iran do not need West or East (meaning capitalism and socialism) as alternatives to development, but actually, Islamic philosophy was so rich to guide the way forward. The case of the Cultural Revolution, following the political and structural revolution of 1979 was a case in point, occurring in 1980. One main goal was to purify and Islamicize the system of education, as quoted by Borjian (2013), Ayatollah Khomeini believed that 'what we are most afraid of is cultural imperialism and having colonial universities through which our youth would be trained to be at the service of either capitalism or communism (p. 68). Following such a general policy, Franklin company Press was changed, the Iran-America institute was controlled, many Islamic centers were formed (Islamic association, university crusade, among others), and SAMT was established. This attitude left its trace in textbook publication and curriculum design to include Islamic ideology and principles in line with the purification policy (Majdzadeh Tabatabai, 2006).

Despite the heated debate on resisting linguistic imperialism, as a cultural control over the country, many of the language-related centers

continued their activities. Iran-America institute, for example, merely changed its title to ILI (Iran Language Institute) and even kept its audiolingual (American) method of language teaching. Saffarazadeh (1990), conducted a survey study in relation to the attitudes toward the English language and found that all respondents believe that foreign language should be taught at schools and universities, and almost everybody agreed that English should be the first foreign language. In the case of general policy, it was reasoned that the teaching of English could gain technological and scientific independence from the West, and help advertise the Islamic ideology in other lands (ibid). In addition, it was insisted that any traces of Western symbols and ideologies should be eliminated at the expense of Islamic thoughts to empower the learners and the teachers in the combat against cultural imperialism.

Borjian (2013) believes that in these early times, it could be said that the designers of the English language textbooks generally focused on indigenization and externalization, meaning that the authorities tried to do much in order to domesticate the principles of English textbooks with the cultural values of the country (Mostly considering the Islamic past) and also borrow (implicitly) from the Western scientific frontiers in relation to language teaching and learning.

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and following the Iran-Iraq war, there was much attempt to reconstruct the infrastructure of the country in the late 1980s and most of the 1990s. This period which was parallel to the publication and use of *Right*

Path to English series, aimed at pragmatism and privatization of the economic sectors of the country. Embarking on the five-year economic, social, as well as cultural development plans, the system attempted at aligning with the world (Western) centers advocating a diplomatic attitude (Milani, 1993, cited in Gheissari and Nasr, 2006). This led the way for private schools, but the curriculum was still controlled by the government and the ministry of education, and consequently, no significant change was made by the private sectors for materials development. Despite the open arms towards the Western centers and global affiliation, the number of hours for teaching English was reduced and learners at schools had to start from the seventh grade of junior high school. Still, the dual forms of acceptance and rejection of the Western ideals marginally opened the gate for the Western-produced materials which made many authorities and experts of language teaching familiar with non-domestic materials and approaches.

In the early third millennium, the reform cabinet began more collaborative work with the World Bank and the United Nations in order to include the macroeconomic policies within the program and establish cultural ties with the country (Weiss and Sanford, 2008). The World Bank report (ibid) explicitly declares that cultural, educational, and social support could happen on the condition that the economic loans and plans are implemented according to the World Bank measures. This was to accept to a large extent the neoliberal plan for the economic development. But economic development in their

second and third versions mentions nothing of the changes for English language learning. The only one begins in the fourth five-year development plan (2005-2009). There were many worries about learning outcomes at schools and universities, as the economic and scientific improvement could not happen without a significant development in the real proficiency of the human resource sectors, in order to achieve the ideals of the Islamic Revolution (laws of the fourth economic, social and cultural development plan of the IRI: 2005-2009).

Many changes happened within the country during the first decade of 2000. Internet technology was prevalent among Iranians, the significance of acquiring the English language was becoming evident for everybody, particularly for those who aimed at higher education and presence in the international setting, and the British council was allowed to start its activities in 2001 (Borjjan, 2011), however, still no particular change was made for the English textbooks at schools. Most of the changes were in the private sector increasing the quality of teaching and learning outcomes, at the expense of the textbooks and learners at schools.

It is surprising that within the indigenized cabinet of the post-reform government the changes to textbook was realized concretely. Despite the serious opposition from the West to the general policy of the cabinet, closing down the British council, firing several emeritus professors in the educational settings, and making fundamental changes in the ministry of education (as far as the aims and the

prospective plans were concerned), and sanctioning several foreign publication houses (Borjian, 2013), there was a practical plan to rewrite the materials for schools. There were several pushes through policies issued for universities to start publishing research articles in order to domesticate (or Islamicize) the materials. But there were still ambivalent policies confusing the system from other sources. For example, language teaching at schools began, once more from the sixth grade of junior high school, there was an English Channel broadcasting the country's news in British and American accents, and some schools provided bilingual (Farsi/English) medium of instruction, among others, so that the "domestic and foreign policies were shaped around the slogans of 'revitalizing the early revolutionary principles' and fighting 'the unjust imperialism'" (ibid, p. 158). This was done at the textbook production level through Islamicization and purification.

There might be an argument against the claim indicating that Iran is a postcolonial state. The historical records indicate that despite the fact that Iran was not colonized in the classic sense of the world, as was the case with Indian experience, it is now and then experiencing the postcolonial state of mind. In this section, evidence will be put forth to support that Iran has been experiencing, as it is now (see the section concerning resistance) the postcolonial state.

Since the emergence of modern concepts in Iran and following the political changes after the Constitutional Revolution, Iran has been constantly under the influence of Western cultural and social

presumptions (Zarshenas, 2015). Borjian (2013) conducted a study indicating that both before and after the Islamic Revolution, the governing system was to some extent resisting Western influence. It was true that in Pahlavi's regime, the system emphasized the Iranian historical root for empowering society (combating Marxism), it is the Islamic ideology that played this role after the revolution. Resisting linguistic imperialism, one of the main explicit underpinnings of the Islamic Revolution was to re-construct the cultural products (textbooks in particular) through organizations such as the Committee of Sketching and Planning Foreign Languages directed by Tahereh Saffarzadeh, or the SAMT publication center (1990). Zarshenas (2015) argues within the same line that the liberal and neoliberal attitudes both within the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic states were either affiliated with the Western-oriented secular system of Pahlavi or embedded in the resisting Islamic state of the post-revolution era. He, further, suggests some resistance resolution in empowering the Islamic/Iranian roots in cultural terms on the one hand, and economic resistance on the other (following the recent general policies) to combat such a debilitating hegemony.

A key Iranian figure among these intellectuals was Shariati who criticized the clerical passive reaction to the tyrannies of the Western civilization, and apolitical agencies, limited to their unending jurisprudence discussion behind closed doors. He was to some extent a believer in the Lutheran reformation within the Islamic society of Iran and tried to borrow the theoretical principles of Marxism and

Liberalism in order to find a model of revitalization for Islamic interpretation as a social pragmatic model of action. Comparing the socio-historical changes of Christianity with the passive conditions of Iran, he encouraged young people to have a revolutionary radical ideology to have Islamic Protestantism within the society for a change, and a manifestation of Islam devoid of traditional outdated principles.

Conclusion

It might be assumed that colonialism has long been over due to the 20th century independence movements; however, the traces and the aftermath has turned into postcolonial era. This means that the means and tools of dominance has merely changed. As it is famously noted, there is always a sort of power relation among all the individuals, institutes, and countries at large, and this is not unexceptional for education. This study reviewed the condition for postcolonial world, and then claimed that Iran, due to the historical and socio-cultural environment, was trapped within the dominated world. Consequently, its educational organization in general, and second language education in particular was affected. The resistance movements, and the intellectuals that reacted to such a discourse were some evidence to the point.

References

- Bailey, R. (1991). *Images of English: a cultural history of the language*. The University of Michigan Press.
- Borjani, M. (2011). The rise and fall of a partnership: the British Council and the Islamic Republic of Iran (2001-2009). *Journal of Iranian Studies*, 44(4), 541-562.
- Borjani, M. (2013). *English in post-revolutionary Iran*. Multilingual Matters.
- Borjani, M. and Borjani, H. (2011). Plights of Persian in the modernization era. in J. Fishman and O. Garcia (Eds), *handbook of language and ethnic identity the success-failure continuum in language and ethnic identity efforts* (vol. 2) (pp. 254-267). OUP.
- Boroujerdi, M. (2013). *Iranian intellectuals and the tormented triumph of nativism* (translated into Farsi by Jamshid Shirazi). Farzan Rouz.
- Brown, G. (1990). Cultural values: the interpretation of discourse. *ELT Journal*, 44(1), 11-17.
- Cameron, D. (2002). Globalization and the teaching of communication skills. In David Block and Deborah Cameron (Eds.), 2002, *Globalization and language teaching*. Routledge, 67–82.
- Candlin, C. N. (1984). Syllabus design as a critical process. *Language Learning and Communication*, 3(2), 129-145.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a global language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Galtung, J. (1971). A structural theory of imperialism. *Journal of Peace Research*, 8(2), 81–117.
- Gheissari, A. & Nasr, V. (2006). *Democracy in Iran: history and quest for liberty*. OUP.
- Giroux, H. (1991). *postmodernism, feminism, and cultural politics: redrawing educational boundaries*. SUNY.

- Gulalp, H. (1995). The crisis of westernization in Turkey: Islamism versus nationalism. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 8(2), 175-182.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2006). written language, standard language, global languages. In Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and Cecil B. Nelson (eds). *The Handbook of World Englishes*. Blackwell, pp. 349-35.
- Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2019). *Empire* (translated into Farsi by Reza Najafzadeh). Ghasideh Sara.
- Harvey, D. (2019). *The new imperialism* (translated into Farsi by Hossein Rahmati). Akhtaran.
- Hayes, A. (1983). Planning a project. In C. J. Brumfit (Ed). *Language teaching projects for the third world*. Pergamon Press. pp. 15-28.
- Hoffman, P. T. (2015). *Why did Europe conquer the world?* Princeton University Press.
- Howatt, A. P. R. (1984). *A history of English language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Kontra, M. (1997). *English linguistic and cultural imperialism and teacher training in Hungary*. Report on the second ELT conference on teacher training in the Carpathian Euro-region, Debrecen, Hungary, 25-27, 1997. British Council, pp 83-88/
- Kramsch, C. (2002). In search of the intercultural: review article. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 6(2), 275-285.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). Dangerous liaison: globalization, empire and TESOL. In J. Edge (ed.), *Re-locating TESOL in an age of empire*. Pargrave McMillan. pp. 1-26
- Majdzadeh Tabatabai, M. (2006). *National identity and civic values in the pre-revolution and post-revolution English as a foreign language textbook in Iran*. PhD dissertation, Lyola Univesriy, Chicago, IL.

- Mansoori, A. (1986). *American missionaries in Iran, 1834-1934*. PhD dissertation, Ball state University, Muncie, IN.
- Ngugi, W. T. (1993). *Moving the center: the struggle for cultural freedoms*. James Currey.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. Routledge.
- Pennycook, A. (1998). *English and the discourses of colonialism*. Routledge.
- Philipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press.
- Philipson, R. (2009). *Linguistic imperialism continued*. Routledge.
- Richards, J. C., & Rogers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed). Cambridge University Press.
- Rogers, J. (1982). The world for sick proper. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 36(3), 144-51.
- Rothkopf, D. (1997). In praise of cultural imperialism. *Foreign Policy*, 38-53.
- Safavi, A. (2004). *History of education in Iran: from the ancient time to 2001*. Tehran: Roshd.
- Saffarzadeh, T. (1990). Preface. In R. Deedari, N. M. Ziahosseiny and Varzegar (eds). *English for Students of medicine*. SAMT.
- Weiss, M. A. & Sanford, J. E. (2008). *CRS report for congress: The world bank and Iran*. Received from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22704.pdf>, on January 6th, 2020.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1968). *The teaching of English through science*. In Dakin, Tiffeni, & Widdowson, pp. 115-75.
- Yarmohammadi, L. (2005). ESP in Iran from a language planning perspective. In G. Kiany & M. Khayyamdar (Eds). *proceedings of the first national ESP/EAP conference*. (pp.2-20). Tehran: SAMT.

Zarshenas, Sh. (2015). *Iranian neoliberalism and cultural hegemony* (in Farsi).
Nashre Ma'ref.

Ziahosseiny, M. (2005). Key figures of ELT: professor Seyyed Mohammad
Ziahosseiny. *ILI Language Teaching Journal*, 1(1), 99-106.