

Linguistic Democracy in English Language Teaching

Reza Pishghadam¹, Fahimeh Saboori¹

¹ English Department, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad
PO box 9177948974, Park Square, Ferdowsi University, Mashhad, Iran

Abstract: The major purpose of the present study was to examine English Language Teaching (ELT) in the light of democracy in Iran. To this end, first we have presented the major tenets of democracy, such as Equality and Freedom, then we have discussed these major principles in ELT in general, and finally linguistic democracy has been debated in the context of ELT in Iran. Our analyses show that linguistic democracy is not totally upheld in the field of English language education, requiring more attention and transformation. In the end, the results were discussed in the context of English language education in Iran and some suggestions were made.

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1. Introduction

The 20th century has probably been one of the most eventful eras in the world history witnessing a series of political upheavals including revolutions (Russian and Chinese), decolonization as a result of the end of the European empires (especially those of Britain and France), the two world wars, and the rise and fall of such metanarratives as Nazism, Fascism, and Communism. Nevertheless, when asked to pick out the one most significant of this century's events, a striking answer would be that of Kumar (1999), namely, the rise of democracy.

It sounds like a sensible answer though, when considering the ever-increasing impact democracy has ever since had on different aspects of today's life. Throughout its widespread presence, democracy was no more restricted to the political context of governing some people. As a matter of fact, far from having a solely political application, democracy has had the potential to be applied in a variety of other contexts such as cultural, social, and religious ones, to name a few. That is to say, it has practically turned into a popular method of reaching decisions in areas as diverse as entertainment, education, art, science, and theology.

In this study, we intend to examine English Language Teaching (ELT) in Iran to see whether the democratic ideas have permeated in ELT. To this end, we first present the core notions of democracy, then the manifestations of democratic notions are discussed in ELT, and finally ELT context is examined in Iran.

2. Democracy

The first democracy dates back to more than 2400 years ago when it is believed to have been used as the governing system in the Greek city state of Athens.

Correspondingly, the term "democracy" originates from the Greek words "demos" meaning *people* and "kratos" meaning *power*, representing people's power, popular sovereignty, or rule by people (Hunt, Martin, Rosenwein, Hsia, & Smith, 2007).

As clear and familiar as it seems to be, this concept does not yield itself to one universally accepted definition (Fields, 1996, Prothro & Grigg, 1960). There are albeit a number of typical definitions proposed by different scholars all sharing some features which are regarded as the cornerstones of democracy. They include equality, freedom, majority rule/minority rights.

Equality: based on this principle, in a democratic society all citizens are equal before the law and they all enjoy equal rights, opportunities, treatment, and access to power and justice (Post, 2011, Diamond & Morlino, 2005). In addition, such society offers its people equal participation in the process of self-government in the forms of voting and communication within public discourse.

Freedom: this principle mainly entails three types of freedom: political, civil, and social; and includes such fundamental human rights as freedom of individual and political expression, freedom of thought and information, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of association in public and private (Post, 2011, Diamond & Morlino, 2005).

Majority rule/ minority rights: as noted above, the term democracy means rule by people and, in practice, people are generally expressed through its majority; hence, majority rule forms the essence of the concept of democracy (Plattner, 2010). Yet, this principle goes on to include minority rights as well. The reason is that granting supreme power solely to majority rule would simply lead to oppressing and

tyrannizing the minority. Therefore, in this principle, majority rule is paired with minority rights in order to guarantee these rights.

In addition to these major principles, there are some core values which are considered to be essential particularly in the more modern approaches to democracy (Kupchan, 2012). **Pluralism** as the most important of these values denotes the fact that since democracy grants supreme authority to people and since people is represented by a totality of groups (social, ethnic, territorial, religious, etc.), diversity becomes an inevitable component of any democracy (Berndtson, 1999). **Tolerance** is another core value which is closely interwoven with the notion of pluralism in that in the existence of diversity of public interests and forms of their expression a system would not be able to work without the essential presence of tolerance and compromise.

As mentioned earlier, the political, religious, and economic circumstances in the 20th century ignited the spread of waves of democracy in diverse contexts with diverse applications. Nonetheless, its deep penetration in such a wide range of aspects of today's life has earned it a barrage of criticism calling it the "reigning dogma of our time" (Farrelly, 2011). Most of the critical views of democracy center around the belief that, to use Plato's words, "it is full of variety and disorder" and that it eventually leads to chaos (Hanford, 1916, p. 106).

3. Democracy in ELT

3.1. Equality

This primary democratic feature can be investigated in the context of English use and education in two main trajectories. In the first one, English is compared to indigenous languages in countries where English is a second or foreign language. In a democratic situation, while each of the co-existing languages is supposed to fulfill its own unique function in the given multilingual context, each one is expected to have a status equal to the others' and to be equally at disposal of the people. Nevertheless, a scrutiny of this issue reveals that English has seemingly taken on a hegemonizing role in multilingual contexts and created a linguistic hierarchy. This point is best elaborated on by Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism* published in 1992 (Bolton, 2004). In his book, Phillipson first discussed the systematic inequality between the English-speaking countries in the center and those on the periphery, which is evident in the political and economic hegemony of the west. He then went on to give his definition of *English Linguistic Imperialism*: "A working definition of English linguistic imperialism is that the dominance of English is

asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (p. 47, cited in Bolton, 2004, p. 348).

Based on linguistic imperialism, English has a hegemonizing role in the world today and that the powerful west imposes Standard English as the norm through which it exerts its domination (Davis, 2004). They also claim that the expansion of English, by decreasing local languages' central roles and functions, marginalizes them and will ultimately even lead to the demise of some of such indigenous languages. Supporting this notion, Rahman (1999) argued that English necessarily decultures people by replacing their most local cultural norms with Anglo-cultural ones (cited in Kirkpatrick, 2007).

In the same vein, Prodromou (1997) implicitly asserted the lack of democracy in English education context by stating that teaching and learning of English today brings about American hegemony and domination, explaining that, "English is both an instrument for furthering American interests and in turn is furthered by the successful promotion of those interests" (cited in Timmis, 2007, p. 129).

In the second trajectory, the so-called Standard English is compared to other varieties of English. Here again, in an ideal democratic situation, different varieties of English, including Standard English, are expected to enjoy equal power and status whereas the status quo seems to be otherwise.

A quick overview of English studies worldwide sheds lights on the persistent dominance of the traditional view, i.e. Standard English ideology, in the context of English use and education which has awarded the American and British English the authority to provide and prescribe the norms of usage in all international English using contexts (Bolton, 2004). The so-called Standard English is considered the only appropriate model used in teaching and the idea of using a localized variety of English as the model for teaching in the countries where they have one seems to be so abnormal that some linguistics including Prator (1968) even called it a *heresy*, arguing that such breaking away with the conformity to the native model would necessarily lead to a state of mutual unintelligibility (cited in Berns, 2006). Others like Quirk (2001) stated that it was the duty of linguists like him to make sure that a homogenous standard English is the only variety of English taught in international context (cited in B. B. Kachru, 2006).

The main functions of this ideology, which are virtually taken for granted nowadays, include aiming second language acquisition at the goal of *ambilingualism*, regarding *fossilization* as the final

fate of second language learners, and recognizing the varieties spoken by non-natives as *interlanguage* (Bhatt, 2001). Clearly enough, such prescription of a standard variety is in fact bestowing prestige to just one variety at the expense of suppressing all the others (Milroy & Milroy, 1999 cited in Davis, 2006). Nonetheless, Standard English keeps on acting as a benchmark against which all other varieties should be measured and a norm to which they all should conform. This explains the present circumstances in testing. The proficiency of English learners throughout the world has for long been assessed through centripetal-valued tests such as TOFEL, IELTS, etc. which imply an irrelevant *native* standard reference point against which the users of all other varieties of English should be tested (Jenkins, 2003).

This conformity is of particular importance to the supporters of Standard English ideology since, as we shall see later, they believe it would limit the offshoots and deviations from the norm and would consequently prevent fossilization of incorrect and inappropriate forms (Prator, 1968 cited in Berns, 2006). They even took a step further in defining Standard English as the usage of the educated – excluding regional dialects which he considered as uneducated speech – which has as its basis a common core of English (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1972, cited in Davis, 2006). This common core contains the linguistic features that are present in and shared by all the varieties of English. Not surprisingly, British and American English are identified as the two manifestations of this Standard English. Davis (2006), very cleverly, referred to the discrepancy between this idea of a common core and the prescription of British and American English as the replacement of "One for all and all for one", by "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (p. 514).

In the last four decades, however, along with the ignition of waves of democracy in the context of language education, there have been attempts to challenge the standard language ideology and replace it with the liberation linguistics ideology with the aim of rejecting Standard English as the norm and empowering the new varieties of English as well as their speakers (Bhatt, 2001; Bolton, 2004).

To this end, Kachru and Nelson (1996) suggested that a descriptive approach be applied to the world Englishes. It follows that, rather than dealing with the prescriptive rules of language usage and the way language should and should not be used, and considering diversities as incorrect ways, our approach to the present situation of English language should involve descriptive characterizations of language use and "the way language actually works"

(p. 77). In short, it is time to replace the constant prescription of Standard English by its custodians with the descriptions of different varieties of English used around the world.

Furthermore, Halliday (2006) laid stress on the fact that the standard variety has "no intrinsic value" and that it is "just another dialect, but one that happened to be wearing a fancy uniform" (p. 350). Berns (2006) strongly questioned the validity of centripetal-valued tests which use Standard English as their yardstick. He argued that each setting has its own cultural and social values and since local norms are shaped in accordance with these values, each setting calls for its own nativized variety of English, the one that corresponds to its set of values and norms. As a result, it seems quite absurd to think that Standard English –which culturally represents the Judeo-Christian tradition –can be used cross-culturally and in different international settings without impeding successful communication and intelligibility.

Widdowson (2003) argued that the main importance of Standard English lies in a belief in its guaranteeing effective communication and standards of intelligibility. In his view, Standard English, which is usually defined in reference to its grammar and lexis, is primarily a written variety sanctioned for institutional use. He went on to explain that while being spoken with different accents, Standard English has a distinctive graphology and it is precisely because, as mentioned before, it is a written variety which has been designed for institutional purposes. Put simply, "good spelling represents conformity to convention and so serves to maintain institutional stability" (p. 38). Furthermore, he believed that Standard English is a *shibboleth*, marking the right sort of person. He elaborated on this issue arguing that while grammatical conformity, due to the in-built redundancy of language, is not crucial for effective communication, Standard English places much importance on it (rather than on lexis). The reason, according to Widdowson, is that grammar "is so often redundant in communicative transactions that it takes on another significance, namely that of expressing social identity" and so adopts the role of a distinguisher between members of the community and the outsiders (p. 39). The startling fact here is the existence of an implicit obligation of the membership of this community. In other words, you have just two choices: either you become a member of this community and enjoy its privileges including access to the institutions under its control, or, by persisting in your non-standard ways, you are marginalized and your ungrammatical speech and bad-spelt writing are assigned less importance and are not taken seriously.

Widdowson (2003), finally, striped the attitudinal goodness totally away from Standard English by noting the double standards concerning the issue. He elaborated on it explaining that the stability implied by Standard English is in contrast with the dynamic nature of language and that while Standard English calls for conformity, "proficiency only comes with nonconformity" (p. 42). So you are proficient in English to the extent that you do not conform to Standard English and do not submit to what it dictates to you. In other words, mastery means taking the possession of the language, bending it to your advantage, developing innovations in it, and being able to speak your mind rather than speaking the language.

3.2. Freedom

It should be noted that in the investigation of the second feature of democracy, i.e. freedom, in the context of English use and education, our concern is freedom of expression by which we mean the extent to which one is free to express themselves through a variety of English other than the so-called standard one. So, we had better set out with the question, how much have the non-standard or nativised Englishes actually been used in the body of English writings?

An examination of the growing bodies of literature in English reveals that most of the writers of such literary works are bi- or multilingual and "do not belong culturally to ... the Judeo-Christian tradition" (Kachru & Nelson, 1996, p. 84). Not surprisingly, far from representing traditional canons, the English such writers use is in fact a medium for indigenous expression and is, thus, "de-Anglicised", to use the term of Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008, p. 149). This is, of course, achieved through a range of different techniques and strategies including the use of local similes and metaphors, the translation of idioms and proverbs, the transfer of rhetorical devices, and the use of culture-specific speech styles (Kachru, 1986, cited in Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008).

The reason, according to Thumboo (2006), could be that the multilingual and multicultural contexts inspire bi- or multilingual creative writers to reflect the same hybridity in their creative language through making use of some of the strategies and other resources present in their native language and literature. What is more, such non-English creative writers are even believed to be privileged over the English monolingual ones due to their "access to unique and specific linguistic configurations that are different from those of monolinguals in either language in their repertoires" (Yamuna Kachru, 2006, p. 375). Kachru and Nelson (1996), also, argued that the bilingual creativity of such writers reflect special

linguistic, social and cultural features including mixing of codes, and nativization and acculturation of English in various other cultural settings. The interesting point about these features is that, while marking the text as something other than British or American, they "do not interfere substantially with transmission of message" (p. 76). The reason, of course, is the writers' making the context and action comprehensible to readers through using different strategies. Furthermore, old canons as reference points in the interpretation of such creative writings have been recently replaced by new ones since they were no more capable of accounting for the great cultural and social variations of these literatures.

Referring to the same point, Bolton (2006) asserted that today English has turned into *multi-canonical English* due to its nativization in un-English settings and, consequently, its presenting canons quite different from those of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the European cultural heritage. Moreover, Llamzon (1983) made use of a celebrated metaphor in which a new variety of English is likened to a transplant tree, and extended this metaphor by considering the creative writing and literary masterpieces in that variety as its fruits (cited in Bolton, 2004). This way, he most interestingly demonstrated that as fruits are a sign of maturity and vigor of a tree, creative writing and a local literature in English signal the achieved legitimacy and power of that variety of English.

All in all, considering the greatness of body of literature in nativized varieties, the context of English education seems to be more democratic regarding freedom of expression; however, a tricky question remains to be answered: "How much are these *non-standard* English writings taken seriously and given credit in more official contexts?" The context of publication can best shed light on this issue. Academic journals, particularly ISI ones, as an illuminating example, expect perfect conformity to Standard English and the traditional canons of Judeo-Christian tradition. In fact, the one thing not cared for in such journals is multi-canonical English. Accordingly, not only are the articles written with slightest traces of local color and nativised dynamicity not appreciated by these journals, but they are not even taken seriously and are simply dismissed as "poorly written". Still the striking fact is that such perfect conformity is sometimes demanded in non-native English journals in ESL and EFL countries, too.

3.3. Majority rule

To reiterate, majority rule, which forms the essence of democracy, denotes giving the authority

and ruling power to the majority while guaranteeing the rights of minorities at the same time. In order to investigate this democratic feature in the present context of English use and education, first we need to determine who constitute the majority and minority and what the ruling power refers to.

Since the time English took on the role of the language for international communication, new varieties of English started to spring up in different parts of the world as a natural result of its global spread. The remarkable point is that the speakers of these new Englishes who use English to communicate with fellow non-native speakers far outnumber its native speakers (Widdowson, 2003). Accordingly, the situations in which English is used as a lingua franca among its L2 speakers are much more common than the ones in which English is used between its L1 and L2 speakers (Jenkins, 2003). Therefore, no one can deny the fact that the majority of English speakers today are those with an L1 other than English.

As evident as this fact is, still the supreme power which is supposed to be the majority's is unquestionably given to the native speakers in the form of the authority to provide and prescribe the norms of usage in all international English using contexts. So, native speakers, who in fact constitute the minority, are believed to be the repository and guardian of the true language, as well as the standard setter (Davis, 2004). The manifestation of this fact is evident in virtually all English course books. According to Cook (2008), course books foster unfavorable images of second language users. That is to say, rather than representing positive images of successful L2 users that students could use as models, almost all these books show of L2 users is either ignorant tourists and foreigners, or students struggling to learn the language. And, it is not hard to guess the fascinating photos of which famous people they proliferate; monolingual ones, of course. Accordingly, "students never see successful L2 users in action and so have no role model to emulate other than the native speaker, which they will very rarely match" (p. 143).

This undemocratic situation has been, in the recent decades, frequently criticized by some scholars including Widdowson (2003) who strongly denied the native speakers' claim of the ownership of English language and their right to determine how it should be spoken around the world. In his book *defining issues in English language teaching*, he first referred to the common assumption that the native speakers of English are those living in England, where the language originated and that the very fact that they are native speakers, naturally gives them the

authority to promote Standard English. Furthermore, Standard English is in fact the real and proper English whose privilege over other varieties lies in the fact that it guarantees clear communication and standards of intelligibility. While, based on this assumption, all those who are born to the language are considered to be native speakers and thus should have the authority to maintain Standard English, it is not actually the case; since the majority of English people, who speak some non-standard variety, are themselves instructed in Standard English at school. Based on this argument, he then concluded that the custodians of Standard English are not even natural native speakers but they are a minority of people, a particular self-elected subset of educated native speakers who have the power to impose this standard variety.

And as for the ownership of English, Widdowson (2003) did not deny the dual character of languages of every variety, i.e. performing communicative as well as communal functions, but asserted that no single community and culture has a right to claim the ownership of English due to the simple fact that it is an international language and thus, it transcends the traditional communal and cultural boundaries. He went on to explain that "the very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it" (p. 43).

In the same vein, Jenkins (2003) argued that since English is used for international communication and is, thus, used among speakers from different nationalities, it simply makes no sense to talk of its non-native speakers. Representing this view, she listed some arguments against the use of the term *native* and *non-native* speaker of English, including: its assuming monolingualism to be the world's norm while the majority of people are bi- or multilingual, its disregarding the lingua franca function of English, its being offensive for the proficient users of English to be labeled as *non-native*, and more importantly, by proposing a simplistic view of what constitutes error in English language use, its bringing about problems with the international English testing since it implies an irrelevant *native* standard reference point against which the users of all other varieties of English should be tested.

Cook (1995), as well, made attempts to empower non-native speakers by proposing his *multi-competence* model (cited in Brown, 2007). According to the main tenet of this model, L2 users are quite different from monolingual native speakers and, thus, should not be compared to them; but should be considered in their own right. The main differences, as Cook put it, are as follows:

1. L2 users' knowledge of second language differs from that of native speakers. So, L2 users should not aim at the goal of passing for natives and should not, in turn, be demotivated on their failure in it.

2. L2 users' knowledge of their first language also differs from that of monolingual native speakers. It corresponds to the same familiar fact that L2 has always some effect on L1.

3. "L2 users think in different ways to the monolinguals" (p.196). Put simply, L2 user's mind is much more flexible than that of native speaker since they have access simultaneously to two competences rather than one; so, they have higher language and culture awareness.

Thus, "learning another language changes people in many ways... affecting not only the two languages but also the person as a whole" (p. 196). In short, this model regards L2 users superior to monolingual native speakers due to the merits mentioned above, and challenges the common assumption that the monolingual native speaker is the norm and a reference point against which L2 users should be measured.

3.4. Pluralism and tolerance

Clearly enough, a necessary condition for a democratic pluralism is the existence of a variety of discourses rather than just one, which inevitably would lead to dictatorship. This is not a sufficient condition, though. What makes it sufficient, as well, is a situation in which all the voices can be heard and that is why such pluralism calls for tolerance and compromise.

English as the language of international communication has for long been, and still is, spreading all over the world, and since any transmission of language brings about transformation (Widdowson, 2003), this spread has resulted in the existence of different varieties of English, each as a consequence of English contact with a certain language, culture and people. This undeniable hybridity fulfills the necessary condition of a democratic context of English use and education. As for the sufficient condition, these new Englishes need to be legitimate. However, the prevalent traditional view, that is, Standard English ideology, strongly denies the legitimacy of other varieties of English and even calls them the offshoots and deviations from the norm, to use Prator's words (1968, cited in Berns, 2006). The dominance of such traditional view can be witnessed in most publication including English textbooks and journals in which different varieties of English do not still seem to have gained legitimacy. In some textbooks, for instance, there are some random exposures to new Englishes, but such

exposures are so infrequent and limited that by no means represent the actual hybridity in the present context of English use.

Again, such undemocratic situation could not escape criticisms. It was most severely criticized by Kachru's theory of World Englishes (1982). *World Englishes* is defined as a theory used to "legitimate the Englishes spoken in the British non-white colonies" and the ideology behind it denies a special status for the native speakers of metropolitan English varieties and complains about these native speakers' discriminations against users of world Englishes (Davis, 2004, p. 442). The underlying philosophy of Kachruvian approach argues for the "importance of inclusivity and pluricentricity in approaches to linguistics of new varieties of English" and attempt to de-marginalize and legitimize the new Englishes (Bolton, 2004, p. 367). Also, according to Bhatt (2001), World Englishes paradigm discusses the global spread of English and the large number of functions it has taken on with increasing range and depth in diverse sociolinguistic settings around the world. This paradigm particularly emphasizes multilingualism, multicultural identities, multiple norms of use, and bilinguals' creativity. Moreover, having its theoretical and philosophical foundations in liberation linguistics, it severely problematizes the sacred cows of the traditional theoretical and applied linguistics including interference, interlanguage, native speaker, speech community, ideal speaker-hearer, Standard English, and traditional English canon.

This tension between the prescription of a world standard English and the legitimacy and autonomy of world Englishes calls to mind the double-voicedness of Bakhtin's (1994) centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal forces, as a modernist feature, call for centralizing, homogenizing and convergence, which in the present context, contribute to the conformity to an authoritative and prescriptive standard variety which is believed to be the best. On the other hand, centrifugal forces, as a postmodernist feature, involve decentralizing and divergence and thus appreciate the diverse features and functions of English worldwide.

3.5. Criticism

As stated earlier, the main criticism leveled at democracy was a belief in its involving too much disorder and variety and its inevitably leading to chaos. Just the same concern has been expressed about a democratic context of English use and education.

It follows that, since different varieties of English have developed in different parts of the

world, naturally, these new Englishes are, with varying degrees, different from the ancestral one. Some people, especially the promoters of Standard English, have recently started to express their fear about this increasing diversity and movement toward divergence since they believe that if the center, i.e. Standard English, doesn't hold, "things fall apart, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world and we are back to Babel" (Widdowson, 2003, p. 36). In other words, English in that case divides up into mutually unintelligible varieties and therefore, loses its value as the international language. Albeit, regarding such fear quite unfounded, the adherents of World Englishes and liberation linguistics have not left it unanswered.

Language, according to Kirkpatrick (2007), has two important functions: communication and identity. He explained the link between function and variety through an "identity-communication" continuum. This continuum suggests that the identity function is highlighted when fewer people are involved in the act of communication and with closer social distance between them. Broad and informal varieties as well as job- and class-specific registers best express this function. In contrast, the more people who are involved in the act of communication, and the greater the social distance between them, the more the function of the language they use turns toward communication end. In other words, communication function assigns much importance to intelligibility and is usually associated with standard and educated varieties. Based on this continuum, Kirkpatrick also presented his view regarding the future of New Englishes. He argued that the mutual intelligibility of these varieties depends on the motivations of the speakers, i.e., their deliberate emphasis on, and the need they feel for, either communication or identity function, as well as on the listener's familiarity with the variety. Put simply, "all speakers of English are capable of being intelligible (or unintelligible) to speakers of other varieties if they are so motivated" (p. 35). He, further, argued that people highlight the identity function in communication within their speech community and communication function in communication between speech communities. He concluded that mutual intelligibility is guaranteed by the need for people to be able to communicate beyond their own speech community.

Referring to the same conflict between mutual intelligibility and group identity, Jenkins (2003) argued that in order for English to be able to function as the world's lingua franca, its different varieties need to be intelligible to each other and that "the main obstacle to such mutual intelligibility is

identity" (p. 36).

Furthermore, Crystal (2003) argued that, as the case of mutual intelligibility does not happen for different dialects of the same language, it is very unlikely to happen for different varieties of English. Considering new Englishes as the international accents and dialects of English, he admitted that at times the speaker of a certain dialect might be unintelligible to the speakers of other dialects, i.e., usually when a need for identity is highlighted at the expense of a need for intelligibility. But this problem can resolve simply by the speaker's slowing down or reducing on difficulties over isolated lexical items. This way he illustrated that although "the need for intelligibility and the need for identity often pull people –and countries –in opposing directions", it is still possible for the two to co-exist happily (p. 127). He, also, took the bold step of assuring that even if the current spread of English and development of new Englishes resulted in their becoming mutually unintelligible, it would be nothing fatal since, in that case, a new World Standard Spoken English (WSSE) would arise and replace the myriad of Englishes.

Widdowson (2003) adopted a slightly different view by considering new varieties of English as *autonomous* languages which will ultimately reach the point of mutual unintelligibility. Distinguishing between language distribution, which involves conformity and adoption, and language spread, which involves adaptation and non-conformity, he explained that English is not so much distributed, as it is spread. He went on to argue that the varieties of English used for specific purposes which are considered as registers have already become mutually unintelligible, at least as far as lexis is concerned, with arising no complain or fear. He, then, called for the same tolerance to be extended to the same situation with local varieties, considered as dialects.

Similarly, Smith and Nelson (2006) regarded mutual intelligibility as a quite natural consequence of the global spread of any language and stated that it is not something about to happen in the future, but it has already happened and is clearly evidenced in the existence of English speakers in some parts of the world who have been unintelligible to other English speakers in other parts since about two centuries ago. They also asserted that there is no need for every English user to be intelligible to all the other English users and that it suffices for them to be intelligible only to those they wish to communicate with.

Finally, Smith's (1992) study deserves great attention here since it shed important light on the issues concerning intelligibility and native speakers (cited in Smith & Nelson, 2006). In this study, he first distinguished between three levels of

understanding, or intelligibility in a broad sense:

1. Intelligibility: recognition of the word/utterance.
2. Comprehensibility: assigning referential meaning to the word/utterance; locutionary force.
3. Interpretability: apprehension of the meaning behind the word/utterance; illocutionary force.

A quite noteworthy facet of this distinction is that, while in ESL and EFL teaching and learning the greatest stress is placed on the first two levels, the most important requirement of a successful communication is interpretability which is, in turn, achieved through gaining acceptable amount of situational, social and cultural awareness. Moreover, based on the startling result of this investigation, "native speakers (from Britain and the United States) were not found to be the most easily understood, nor were they, as subjects, the best able to understand the different varieties of English" (cited in Smith & Nelson, 2006, p. 441). This study had a promising result as well, namely, the one claiming that developing some familiarity with different varieties of English can easily solve the problem of their mutual unintelligibility.

4. Democracy in Iran's ELT

So far, it was tried to provide an overview of the overall context of English use and education with regard to democratic principles and values, as illustrated in Table 1. In this section, a more specific approach is adopted in the examination of the presence of democracy in Iran's formal and informal ELT.

Table 1. Democratic features and their manifestations in ELT.

Democratic feature	Manifestation in ELT	Aim
Equality	Liberation linguistics	Rejection of Standard English as the norm
Freedom of expression	Creative/bilingual's writing	Turning English into multi-canonical English
Majority rule	Death of native speaker	Rejection of native speaker's superiority and ownership of language
Pluralism & tolerance	World Englishes	Legitimizing new varieties of English

The formal educational system in Iran is somehow traditional and centralized: the government's central policies determine the "whats" and "hows" of teaching in the whole country and

dictate them to all schools and teachers demanding complete conformity (Pishghadam & Mirzaee, 2008). Pragmatism, as a democratic notion, which empowers teachers by giving them the freedom to make local decisions and be more plausible and autonomous has no place in such a system. Also, students have no active participation and interaction in the process of making meaning; instead, during their non-constructivist education, they are just passive recipients of knowledge whose individual differences are ignored.

As for the informal context of ELT, far from liberation linguistics' view point, there is strong dominant belief in Standard English as the best variety of English, the norm, and the most appropriate model in teaching and yardstick in testing (Pishghadam & sabouri, 2011a, Pishghadam & saboori, 2011b). In fact, the Standard English ideology has so much dominance and penetration in this context that even if they were given the chance to use another model which might be more practical and useful in their local context, neither teachers nor learners would ever take it. In the same vein, New Englishes are generally regarded as incorrect, inferior, unimportant varieties; that is why the actual pluralism in the international context of English use is not indicated in the classrooms and, not surprisingly, most teachers and learners have negative attitudes towards new Englishes (lack of tolerance). In addition, native speakers are considered to be of higher status and superior to nonnative, bi- or multilinguals. Also, passing for native speakers is the ultimate goal and indicator of highest level of proficiency for the learners (Pishghadam & sabouri, 2011a, Pishghadam & saboori, 2011b).

Finally, for most local journals and publishers, perfect conformity to Standard English is a pre-requisite for publishing English articles and books. English textbooks are representative of the Standard English ideology and superiority of native speaker and do not include adequate exposure of different varieties illustrative of the hybridity in international English use.

5. Concluding Remarks

In a macro scope, it seems that democratic movements in ELT, which started to spread throughout the world about three decades ago, have ever since severely problematized the sacred cows, as Bhatt (2001) put it, of the traditional linguistics including native speaker, Standard English, and traditional English canon. Unfortunately, however, such movements have not developed in Iran's ELT strongly enough to challenge and set it free from the

prevalent traditional views yet.

So, in an attempt to democratize the context of Iran's ELT, there should be a paradigm shift in the educational system: it needs to be decentralized. It also needs to apply more constructivist collaborative methods of teaching to empower teachers and move toward meaningful learning to actively involve learners in the process of learning. Furthermore, rather than teaching and expecting complete conformity to American and British varieties, teachers are required to teach a negotiable variety of English and some strategies for negotiating understanding with those who cannot speak English well and those who speak a different variety. Such strategies are what Graddol (1998) and Willis (1999) called for in ELT (cited in Timmis, 2007). Also, considering the importance of "developing multilingual competence for transnational relationships", English teachers should adopt a multilingual and polyliterate orientation to writing in their classes (Canagarajah, 2008, p. 586). To achieve this goal, teachers should encourage their bilingual students' creative writing by teaching them the proper strategies such as code mixing and code meshing and that it would lead to the gradual pluralization of academic writing.

Moreover, test developers are required to change their benchmark, i.e. native speaker against which all the English speaking people are measured. They are, instead, expected to take the lingua franca status of English into account and develop comprehensive tests in accordance with its pluricentricity.

Finally, material developers are required to adopt a realistic view in taking proper account of pluricentral status of English in the textbooks through aiming for an intercultural communicative competence rather than a monolithic representation of native speaker culture. To this end, teamwork needs to be conducted in the preparation of the textbooks (or maybe localized ones) whereby the speakers of different varieties can contribute by representing their accents, creative writings, and pragmatic norms.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Reza Pishghadam
English Department
Ferdowsi University of Mashhad
PO box 91779-48974, Park Square,
Ferdowsi University, Mashhad, Iran
E-mail: rpishghadam@yahoo.com

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