

IN THE NAME  
OF GOD



**SHEIKHBAHAE UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**EXPLORING INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN  
IRANIAN EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT  
THE STATUS OF ENGLISH AS AN  
INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE (EFL), USE OF  
MOTHER TONGUE IN EFL CLASSROOM, AND  
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NATIVE AND  
NON-NATIVE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR DEGREES OF MASTER OF  
ARTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE

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# **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of my original research work.

Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgment of collaborative research and discussion.

## **DEDICATED TO:**

My mother and my father for their sincere help and support.

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## **Abstract**

In one pole of the continuum of language learning, theoreticians and practitioners traditionally consider English as English as a Second Language or English as a Foreign Language. However, in the other pole of this continuum where English is thought of as the most effective tool for international communication, it is referred to as a Lingua Franca. Those who favor an approach to English growing worldwide believe that the idea that English is considered as the language of the world today is largely the result of linguistic imperialism .While such areas as native speakerism and linguistics imperialism have presented some novel approaches to English language teaching (ELT) in recent years, there are still gaps in this area for further studies and research To address this gap, one of the major purpose of conducting the present study was to investigate Iranian EFL teachers' ideas regarding the condition of English as a lingua franca. For this purpose, an interview was developed and 25 Iranian EFL teachers were interviewed.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Background**

We are living in the age of global interaction and communication. As a tool and medium for this communication, what we need is a perfect perception and comprehension of other's speech in the international context. Broadly speaking, in the new age English has become a vehicle for using the science, technology, commerce, navigation, and so on for all countries over the world.

Therefore, in one pole of the continuum of language learning, theoreticians and practitioners traditionally consider English as ESL (English as a Second Language) or EFL (English as a Foreign Language). However, in the other pole of this continuum where English is thought of as the most effective tool for international communication, it is referred to as EIL (English as an International Language).

Many scholars have discussed different rules and guidelines in every domain of language learning and teaching. In the domain of EIL also there are a vast number of tenets and views regarding language learning and teaching. For instance, Jenkins has elaborated on some views on the issue of accent from an EIL perspective. These views are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

According to Acar (2002), the global spread of English has changed English into a non-English socio-linguistic context. There are many debates and conflicts on the assumption that a single Standard English (American or English) should be developed for the whole world (Quirk, 1985).

On the contrary, others such as Kachru (1991) believe that the new context of English needs a new kind of Standard English. Some experts in this area like Phillipson and Canagarajah (1999) refer to the concept of "linguistic imperialism" as a

common phenomenon which should be tackled by countries which use English for different purposes.

Those who favor this critical approach to the spread of English around the world believe that the idea that English is considered as the language of the world today is largely the result of linguistic imperialism (Kachru, 1985). In this regard, they point out that as an impact on teaching methodology by linguistic imperialism in several aspects of language learning, some significant changes need to be made in the domain of language learning and teaching methodology, In order to make these changes successfully in language teaching methodology, teachers and administrators need to have an adequate level of critical awareness of the status of English as an International language.

Canagarajah (1999) mentioned that today the main concern of many English teachers in periphery countries is how to follow a native-like accent rather than how to teach English successfully. He believes that this kind of perspective toward language teaching on the part of English teachers has a negative impact on their teaching effectiveness.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

While such areas as native speakerism and linguistics imperialism have presented some novel approaches to English language teaching (ELT) in recent years, there are still gaps in this area for further studies and research (McKay, 2003), especially in the context of Iran. In other words, to the best of the present researcher's knowledge, although some Iranians have published papers discussing these issues theoretically (e.g., Talebinejad)(2001) no studies seem to have been conducted in Iran to explore Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the status of English as an international language

and other related issues such as native vs. nonnative speaker teachers and the use of mother tongue in EFL classroom.

More precisely, Iranian EFL teachers' understanding of the reasons behind the spread of English around the world and the linguistic, cultural and ideological disadvantages and consequences of this happening has not been studied. Similarly, the researcher failed to find published research on Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of mother tongue in EFL classroom. Finally, no study was found on their beliefs about native versus nonnative speaker teachers of English.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

Some scholars have started to regard the sociopolitical aspect of language learning as an integral part of second language education (Pennycook, 1990). Therefore, such concepts as language imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) and native speakerism (Holliday, 2006) have recently been studied. The main idea behind the concept of linguistic imperialism is that most people agree that today English plays the role of a lingua franca around the world not because of a growth in the number of native speakers or the ease of learning and using it but because of an increase in the number of individuals in the world today who believe it is to their benefit to acquire English (Phillipson, 1992). The idea of native speakerism which is a major issue related to linguistic assimilation is an ideology within ELT representing the dominance of a "western culture" in the way second language teachers look at EFL/ESL. Native speakerism can be regarded as the role of culture in language teaching that reflects a native speaker model, an approach that once again needs to be reassessed with reference to the teaching of EIL (McKay, 2003).

Since language learning and teaching is a broad spectrum with intricate issues interwoven with it and English has recently taken on the role of transferring science to nations around the world, teachers as the core and the main part of the spectrum of language must be aware of multiple issues regarding their teaching methodology. Therefore, they must gain the ability to probe the process of learning English as an international language more than before. To do this, they need to have a kind of precise and critical look at language curriculum (Kachru, 1995). Thus, in different countries, especially periphery countries such as Iran, researchers should conduct studies in order to explore EFL teachers' beliefs about why English these days is acting as the medium of international communication.

In addition, such related issues as advantages and disadvantages of being a native or nonnative teacher of English as well as whether mother tongue is a legitimate tool to be used in EFL classroom and, if yes, when it should be used have been attached enormous importance by scholars involved in the area of linguistic imperials and EIL. Therefore, EFL teachers' beliefs about these aspects of English language instruction should be explored. Studies of this nature can pave the way and provide the knowledgebase for further measures to take in order to raise teachers' critical awareness of the status of English as an international language and help them develop adequate understanding of the implications of this status for classroom practice.

#### **1.4. Purpose of the Study**

One of the major purposes of conducting the present study is to explore Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the status of English as an international language. This purpose has its origins in the researcher's concern about how critically aware Iranian EFL teachers are of why English has turned into the lingua franca used for international communications around the world and how it works to contribute to or



disadvantage those who use it as a foreign language. The other purposes of conducting this study are exploring Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of mother tongue in EFL classroom and the differences between native and non-native teachers of English. Finally, attempts will be made to explore the interconnections between these different sets of beliefs.

## **1.5. Research Questions**

The major questions directing this study are as follows:

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the status of English as an international language (EIL), i.e. the reasons behind its spread and advantages and disadvantages of this spread?
2. What are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the use of mother tongue in EFL classroom?
3. What are Iranian teachers' beliefs about the differences between native and non-native teachers of English in terms of their teaching abilities and skills?
4. How are Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about the status of EIL, use of mother tongue in EFL classroom and differences between native and non-native teachers of English connected with each other?

Since the present study has a qualitative nature, and qualitative research is mainly aimed at creating rather than testing hypotheses, no hypotheses have been developed for this study.

## **1.6. Definition of key terms**

**Linguistic imperialism** is the view that today English is a global lingua franca and has achieved this status not because of a growth in the number of native speakers but

because of an increase in the number of individuals in the world today who believe it is to their benefit to acquire English (Phillipson, 1992).

**Native-speakerism** is an established belief that 'native speaker' teacher represents a "western culture" from which springs the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology (Holliday, 2006).

**Teacher beliefs** have been defined by Kagan (1992) as "tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught" (p. 65). Beliefs are believed to be deeply entrenched and difficult to change (Kagan, 1992).

**English as an International Language (EIL)** refers to the use of English as the means of communication among people from different first language backgrounds and across linguacultural boundaries (Seidlhofer, 2005).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

## **2.1. English as an International Language**

Regarding the concept of English as an International Language (EIL), it is believed it is not possible to focus on a single dimension. In other words, English as an international language is a broad area and contains multiple issues. Therefore, it is close to impossible to develop a fixed and clear definition for it. Different scholars have offered different definitions for English as an international language. For instance, Smith (1976, cited in Robertson & Acar, (2006) defines the term "international language" as a means of communication by people from different cultures. In this definition EIL is conceptualized in a broad and universal rather than a local sense.

Mckay (2002, cited in Robertson & Acar,(2006) believes that in specifying the use of the term "English as an International Language" a question may be raised as to whether or not the spread of English in multicultural countries like South Africa and Kenya is regarded as an instance of the use of English as an international language. She proceeds to assert that to some extent it is.

Mckay (2002) believes that a close analysis leads us to believe that one of the main features of English as an international language is that English is used as a tool for cross-cultural communication and, therefore, there is no need to require a kind of overlap with national borders.

According to Cook (2003), another feature of an international language is its reasonable level of difficulty. He believes that some languages are less complicated and simpler than other languages. For instance, one reason for the expansion of English as an international language is that it is simple and easy to learn. He also points out that some languages are regarded as more beautiful, efficient, or romantic than others.