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## Issues of Ideology in English Language Education Worldwide: An Overview

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### Abstract

The relatively limited consideration of ideology in mainstream theory and research of teaching the English language to speakers of other languages has arguably prevented the problematization of many taken-for-granted perceptions and practices of the field. In this article I attempt to bring part of this marginalized body of scholarship on issues of ideology in the area of English language teaching (ELT) to highlight its potential insights for the field. The article sets out from a view of ideology as *the most fundamental beliefs in any social practice*, which may provide a less-formidable conception of the term and lessen the divergence among the minority of ELT researchers and professionals that do concern themselves with ideology. Then, after a brief sketch of the notion of ideology of language (education), I present an overview of aspects of this marginal but vibrant stream of thought on issues of ideology in ELT worldwide. Overall, the discussion is aimed to act as a call for the further understanding and embracement of sociopolitically-sensitive and ideologically-informed approaches to ELT theory, research, and practice.

### Introduction

The term *ideology* may predominantly bring to mind a traditional Marxist conception of the term, which “has often been conceptualized as false-consciousness” (Platt and Williams, 2002, p. 331). Based on this dominant perception, ideology tends to be usually understood as *bad belief* and probably this very understanding has been the basis of the dichotomization of ideological orientations and presumed impartial scientific knowledge. Despite this prevailing idea, however, it may be naïve to reserve the term only as a label to mark the *idea of the other* imposed on the rest (Eagleton, 1991; Gramsci, 1971; van Dijk, 1998) and to see it as *an upside-down view* of the world (Holborow, 2006). A consequence of this naiveté in adopting a *restrictive* rather than an *inclusive* conception of ideology (Thompson, 1984), can be the escape of many normalized categories of knowledge under the disguise of non-ideological universalities.

Restrictive Marxist conceptions of ideology have been relied on to deny the ideological and sociopolitically-biased nature of certain beliefs and to denounce others as biased and false (van Dijk, 1998). Along this very path and possibly in denying the epistemologically, politically, and socioculturally-biased modern values (Holliday and Aboshiha, 2009), there has even been

calls for *end of ideology* (Thompson, 1984). According to Holliday (2010), “Western theories of culture... demonstrate a high degree of *denial* of ideology. In the academy there is a powerful emphasis on the scientific neutrality of theories of culture...” (p. 2). In contrast, a more inclusive and fuzzy (van Dijk, 1998) view of ideology may be broadly formulated as “an assemblage of ideas providing conceptions of past, present, and future social conditions” (Platt and Williams, 2002, p. 330). Based on such an inclusive perspective, van Dijk defines ideologies as shared fundamental belief systems of a social collectivity;

[They] are not any kind of socially shared beliefs, such as sociocultural knowledge or social attitudes, but more fundamental or axiomatic. They control and organize other socially shared beliefs... [A]s the sociocognitive foundation of social groups, ideologies are gradually acquired and (sometimes) changed through life or a life period, and hence need to be relatively stable. (van Dijk, 2006, pp. 117)

Such a conception reflected in van Dijk’s extensive work on ideology (1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2004, 2006) and concisely stated as *the most fundamental belief systems in any social practice*, shapes the theoretical perspective that underlies the discussion of the international landscape of ideologies of English language teaching (ELT) in this article. The label on ideology as *too philosophical* may have been a justification for avoidance and the marginalization of concerns over ideology in mainstream trends of the field. This may have in some cases meant obsession with rudimentary issues and distance from the exploration and problematization of profound epistemological and sociopolitical concerns which may be ironically expected from academic theory and research. Therefore, in this article I present an overview of aspects of this relatively small but inherently vibrant and potent stream to highlight some of the insights it may create for the discourse community of the field. This overview may also act as a call for the further recognition and embracement of more ideologically-sensitive approaches as legitimate and viable and even indispensable to scholarship of academic and professional ELT enterprise.

## Language (Education) Ideologies

In discussing language ideology, Seargeant (2009) mentions several traditions of debates on the concept of ideology such as neutral, critical, and Marxist standpoints, but opts for an understanding of the term similar to that of van Dijk and asserts that, at least in the context of linguistic anthropology, the term ideology can refer to a “system of entrenched beliefs about aspects of the lived experience which structure one’s relationship to that experience” (p. 27). The crucial social functionalities of ideologies thus defined coupled with the observation that “a definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world” (William 1977, p. 21, cited in Woolard, 1998, p. 3), would trigger a challenging interest in the possible treasure of implications of exploring an integrated concept of *language ideologies*. Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) and Woolard (1998) refer to several conceptions of the notion of language ideology. Based on these varying conceptions, language ideologies may be taken as “self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group” (Heath, 1977, p. 53, cited in Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994) and “shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world” (Rumsey, 1990, p. 346, cited in Woolard, 1998).

Another formulation of the notion of language ideology is reflected in the quadruple conception developed by Woolard (1998). De Costa’s (2011, p. 349) account of this conception, illustrates language ideologies as constructions shaped by *speakers’* sociocultural experiences and include “(1) ideas about the nature of language itself; (2) the values and meanings attached

to particular codes; (3) hierarchies of linguistic value; and (4) the way that specific linguistic codes are connected to identities and stances”. More recently, McGroarty (2010, p. 3), defined language ideologies as “the abstract (and often implicit) belief systems related to language and linguistic behavior that affect speakers’ choices and interpretations of communicative interaction”. Notwithstanding these convolutions and following van Dijk’s general conception of ideology referred to above, I would invite the readers of this overview to view the discussions presented here based on a view of language ideologies as the most fundamental epistemological belief structure *about language*. These fundamental beliefs can act to direct and shape language policies, language attitudes, language use, and, of course language teaching and learning both in language communities and within the institutional contexts education.

This potentially wide scope of language (education) ideology, has shaped a distinct area of inquiry in a diversity of contexts, for instance, including Japan, Madagascar, Greece, and the US (Hanson, 2007; Moschonas, 2004; Seargeant, 2009; Wassink and Curzan, 2004). Aspects of these concerns over language education ideologies do underlie debates over the sociopolitics of ELT that has emerged nearly three decade ago by certain individuals and streams of thought (e. g. Pennycook, 1989). At a more conspicuous level, issues of ideology are embedded in research on critical and sociocultural aspects of ELT (e. g. Pennycook, 1999, 2001, 2006; Phillipson, 1992; Rajagopalan, 2004; Rivers, 2015). Explicit discussion of the notion of ideology in ELT, however, has hardly been received as normal disciplinary scholarship in the area of language education and applied linguistics and has remained as a markedly alternative category. The rest of the article explores aspects of this marginalized but crucial concern in the field and emphasizes some of the possible messages projected by a serious consideration of ideological understanding of issues of language education.

## Issues of Ideology in ELT

The mainstream theoretical and empirical accounts of second language acquisition, teaching methodology, syllabus development, teaching materials, language testing, etc., and even liberal cultural considerations and variationist sociolinguistic accounts of language education, largely tend to bypass political and ideological concerns, if not to reject and denounce them. Therefore, mainstream ELT literature tends to largely avoid such concerns. Ideology-sensitive arguments that did find way into the acclaimed scenes of the field, have continued to appear as controversial arguments sometimes even cautioned against by the very editors (e. g. Pennycook, 1990); to appear as marked special issues (e. g. Norton, 1997; Pennycook, 1999); or to be subject to debates and reply-to type of discussions (e. g. Karmani, 2005; Simpson, 2009).

Therefore, although the frequency of the appearance of sociopolitical considerations of ideological issues in the field may be arguably at rise, the relative amount of such appearances is far from proportionate to the sheer volume of mainstream publications of field. The nature and quality of the (mis)understandings of notions like criticality and ideology in publications under these rubrics is a yet more complicated problem. Therefore, on the one hand, cases of discussions in the field of ELT referring to the notion of *ideology* as one of their concerns, is relatively small. On the other hand, the conception of the issue is far from agreed upon among different scholars and authors. Many of them take the concept for granted and leave it as vague as it is; others take the dominant Marxist conception of ideology as *false consciousness*; and a very small minority consider the term based on the perspective of ideology as *fundamental belief*, similar to the one proposed by van Dijk referred to above.

The very (mis)conceptions of ideology in the field, the aspects that are more frequently dealt with, and the issues left out of the debates are discussed in this overview. Apart from the majority of the publications of the field which avoid the term, there are cases of blunt rejection of critical perspectives (Atkinson, 1997; Gadd, 1998) and call for moving *beyond* ideology to serve students under ironic pleas for student empowerment and autonomy (Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Nunan, 2003). These silent or opposing parts of the literature are, of course, not dealt with in this overview, unless in cases which have raised insightful debates (e. g. Waters, 2009a).

Following the entrance of the notion of *critical* into the area of language education (Graman, 1988; Pennycook, 1989, 1990) from the realms of critical education (Freire, 1973; Gibson, 1986) and critical linguistics (Kress and Hodge, 1979), the first accounts of *ideology* in ELT started to emerge (Tollefson, 1991; Dendrinos, 1992). In one such early account, Benesch (1993) brought the two words of *ideology* and *politics* in the title of her writing, asserting that that “all forms of ESL instruction are ideological” (p. 705). Later, Tollefson (2000) followed his own earlier discussion of language policy and planning (Tollefson, 1991) in dealing with more specifically ELT-related issues. The importance of his position is in his conception of ideology as *fundamental beliefs*, on which he relied to problematize the *teaching acts* of manipulating language forms in the process of meaning creation and expression (Tollefson, 2000).

Around the time of Tollefson’s latter writing, Kubota (1998) raised debates on ‘ideologies of English in Japan’ and, like him, she referred to inequalities in relation with the dominance of English and its influence on the Japanese people’s culture and identity. Unlike Tollefson however, Kubota’s conception of ideology seems to be a broad view of language ideology as social worldviews imported into the language education process rather than specific (English) language education belief structures. Therefore, she called for *critical consciousness* as well as practical skills in different varieties of English. In Kubota’s view, the dominant discourses in Japan “reside in the hegemony of the West and represent both resistance to Westernization and accommodation to English. These discourses also tend to exclude non-Western cultures and languages as reference categories” (1998, p. 302)

Later, in early 2000’s Ricento (2000) discussed the interconnections of ‘ideology, politics, and language policies’ with regard to the English language and Modiano (2001) focused on ideology in relation with ELT practitioners and the link between linguistic imperialism and ELT concerns in Europe. For Modiano, too, the notion of ideology seems to be the beliefs loaded on the language education enterprise and propagated in its realm either as language ideologies or as imposed sociocultural ideologies. Notably, the *right* ideologies he proposed to be spread through a lingua franca view of English in ELT are those underlying *globalization* and *cultural pluralism*. Adopting a similar but more bluntly Marxist conception of ideology but proposing clearly different ideals, Holborow (2006) raised the problem of the ‘interconnections between neo-liberalism and English’. She argued that the dominant English language expresses ideologies of neo-liberalism and presents them as naturalized commonsense perceptions. Similarly, referring to *neo-imperial ideology*, Soekirno (2006) raised the problem of loading such ideologies on ELT with highlighting the crisis that the spread of “English in the global world has mesmerized its victims in the classrooms through the operation of curriculum, material, and teaching methodology” (p. 69).

In his more recent contributions, Tollefson (2007) explored issues of ideology and language varieties in dealing with the particular variety that should be used as the preferred variety of teaching and the one preferred for learning. Starting with the notion of language ideology as commonsensical views of the nature of language and communication he

acknowledged the problem that in ELT “the term ideology is used in many ways” (Tollefson, 2007, p. 25). In envisaging some future directions with regard to the ideological considerations of the medium of instruction in ELT, Tollefson observed two key issues: “First, acquisition of English in many contexts is crucial for educational and economic opportunities... A second point of agreement is that maintaining the home language of many learners of English... has enormous importance for individual and group identity” (pp. 32–33).

Seargeant, as another important and fairly prolific scholar in ideological explorations of ELT, has discussed language, ideology, and English in the context of globalization, and has specifically focused on ELT *research* ideologies. In his discussion on the role of ideology in ELT regulation and research, Seargeant (2008) focused on the two perspectives of English as a universal variety and English as diverse local varieties. In accounting for ELT-research-related ideological views, he referred to *internal* and the *external* ideologies, that is, those related to the language itself, and “contextual determinants for the observation and regulation of the subject (the ethical framework or agenda which motivates the research programme). In both cases it is the way that the ‘English language’ (and, to a lesser degree, ‘language in general’) is conceptualized that forms the focus of this ideology” (p. 219).

Moreover, in his book titled *The Idea of English in Japan: Ideology and the Evolution of a Global Language*, Seargeant (2009) presented several of his ideological accounts of English in Japan. He specifically dealt with the notion of ideology in two chapters on ‘Language ideology and global English’ and ‘Rival ideologies in applied linguistics’. In these chapters Seargeant relied on the investigation of some documents and interviews to explore assumptions about English in Japan and to discuss the mechanisms of teaching and researching the language that maintain and *regulate* what he called the *shape* of the language. In another book-size contribution carrying the subtitle of *Ideologies of English in South Korea*, Park (2009) dealt with a diversity of cultural, social, and political problems related to the English language within the South Korean society, although the conception of ideology he adopts is difficult to specify.

Depicting some aspects of challenges with regard to such accounts of ideology in ELT, in a high profile piece in the flagship journal of *Applied Linguistics*, Waters (2009a) bashed ‘ideology in applied linguistics for language teaching’. Following his earlier account of the issue (Waters, 2007), he tried to argue for the promotion of already-established pedagogical traditions against what he called ideological intrusions. In his view, much of today’s applied linguistics for language teaching is not carrying out its role effectively “because a good deal of its discourse promotes or proscribes language teaching ideas on the basis of ideological belief rather than pedagogical value” (p. 138). The considerable issue implied by Waters here, which may be observed as a widespread naturalized assumption in the field, is that pedagogical traditions are based on no ideological beliefs. Based on van Dijk’s conception of ideology as the fundamental beliefs underlying *any social practice*, this assumption by Waters and, therefore, probably his entire argument may need to be revisited.

This entire position seems to be based on the debatable dichotomy of ideological versus non-ideological perspectives and practices and Waters refers to established mainstream scholars of *existing pedagogical traditions* and the alternative voices to illustrate these two sides. For example, he refers to Carter and McCarthy (1996) to depict an ideological orientation, and to illustrate the presumed non-ideological pedagogic trend, he refers to the importance of preparing learners for “successful communication” by providing them “with a repertoire of well selected vocabulary, sentence patterns and grammar, as well as a stock of communication strategies...” (Richards, 2006, p. 22, cited in Waters, 2009a, p. 139).

In response to Waters, Simpson (2009) questioned the distinction of ideological beliefs and pedagogical values. He maintained that Waters failed to recognize the inextricable linkage of ideology and pedagogy. In his consequent response to Simpson, Waters (2009b) repeated himself by calling Simpson's view a further example of the problem. Regardless of the taken-for-granted conception of ideology in the debate, the view that Waters (2009a) loudly presented by highlighting the position of well-known mainstream ELT figures (e. g. Richards, 2006, cited in Waters, 2009a) and how he attempted to demean alternative voices (e. g. Carter and McCarthy, 1996; Pennycook, 1994; Edge, 2006) can be an illustration of how the mainstream ideology has continued to survive and reproduce itself through self-proclaimed non-ideological focus on professional and pedagogical purposes.

More recently, in his article 'English as a lingua franca: Ontology and ideology', Swell (2013) discussed aspects of the notion of English as a lingua franca and argued that neither the proponents nor the opponents of the notion have been able to realistically account for the issues of contemporary ELT. In Swell's view, the very emphasis on the lingua franca nature of English is an undue exaggeration of the existence of such an entity as distinct from other types of English. His arguments shape a call for a more dynamic view of the English language in the ELT enterprise. However, he seems to be using the term ideology in a liberal sense, broadly referring to sociocultural considerations rather than a certain conception of ideology as such. This might signal the point that the term is starting to become part of the theoretical debates of the field, but at the same time it may signal its reduction and oversimplification.

## **Ideology-Informed ELT Research**

The discussions referred to in the previous section are mainly theoretical arguments rather than data-based studies. In addition to these discussions, there is a body of empirical explorations of ideological concerns related to ELT. These studies, too, are not very clear about their conceptions of ideology but generally adopt a version of the Marxist notion of the term or a general conception close the one adopted by Swell (2013) referred to above. This section presents an overview of a number of these explorations of ideologies and sociopolitical concerns with regard to ELT in various parts of the world. The body of references reviewed in this section considers these concerns in tens of countries around the world which represent almost all corners of the non-English-speaking world.

East and Southeast Asia are perhaps the most concerned geographical areas of the world with the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language. Some of the countries in these regions have been adopting policies and attitudes that have by some accounts been 'more English than England itself' (Seargeant, 2005). Pakir who reviewed research on Englishes in Southeast Asia, stated that "scholars in Southeast Asia are now paying attention to the research implications of a shift in paradigm and are investigating features associated with new Englishes, [and] analysing mutual intelligibility and communication in English among Association of Southeast Asian Nations users..." (Pakir, 2010, p. 329). It is in this context that Toh (2003) views mere communicative language education as insufficient and calls for adding a more critical dimension to the ELT policies and practices in Southeast Asian countries.

In Japan as a relatively widely discussed and explored context in terms of ideologies of English (teaching), as early as 1998, Kubota raised concerns about the dominance of English and its social and cultural consequences (Kubota, 1998). Matsuda (2003) also studied the status of English learning and teaching in Japan and argued that despite a belief in the internationality of

English, students did not believe that it *belongs internationally*. With similar concerns, Seargeant took up the issue of ideological considerations of ELT in Japan and discussed it extensively (2005, 2008, 2009). McKenzie (2010) also explored the social psychological problems of attitudes, awareness, and identity in relation with the status of *English as a global language* in Japan. More recently, Rivers (2011, 2013) also studied similar issues with a specific focus on aspects of identity in learning and teaching English in Japan.

South Korea has also been the context of investigations in terms of ideologies and policies of English language education. Linking the Japanese and Korean ELT concerns, Kim-Rivera (2002) focused on ELT in Korea during the period of Japanese colonial rule and examined language policies and English education policies of colonial governments based on a review of the history of the first English school in the country that opened as early as 1883. Yoo (2005) followed a similar line of arguments in the contemporary period and scrutinized the calls in favor of raising English as an official language in South Korea. With a more focused attention to specific educational settings, Ahn (2009) also explored some sociocultural aspects of English teaching in the South Korean educational system and, more specifically concerned with the notion of ideology, Park (2009) studied other aspects of ideologies of English in South Korea.

Also focusing on South Korea, Josephine Lee (2010) explored the spread of the *hegemony of English* in this country by examining the presidential proposal for public school English immersion. She highlighted the four assumptions of *English leads to national competitiveness*; *Conversational English is a top priority*; *English and English only*; and *English brings equality* as the uncovered ideologies. In her own words, the goal of the study was to deconstruct the naturalized assumptions of English embedded within Korean society and reveal ways in which ideologies related to English are imposed on or appropriated by Korea's language policies, academia, and the media... [and] to illustrate how language ideologies surrounding English are locally reproduced and how the discursive output of these ideologies contributes to reinforce the hegemony of English in South Korea... (Lee, 2010, p. 246)

In the Chinese context, Chang (2006) discussed aspects of the English language policy and the education of English as an academic major within the context of globalization. Also referring to the force of globalization, Lidi (2008) problematized the implications of the spread of English in China. De Costa (2011) investigated the issue of beliefs of a Chinese learner of English in light of the discursive turn in second language acquisition and through the constructs of language positioning and language ideology. Referring to a few studies on language ideologies in second language learning settings (Anderson, 2009; Razfar, 2005), De Costa highlighted the discursive nature of such ideologies and how the learner's language ideologies influenced learning process. Following a similar line of research concerns and in a related setting, recently De Costa's (2016) book-length contribution presented detailed discussions of his ethnographic case studies of ideological aspects of English language learners' identities in Singapore.

The important and intriguing topic of ELT ideological orientations at the policy level was explored by Pan (2011) in a study on ideologies of English in Chinese language education policies. Relying on the notion of language ideology and Gramsci's conception of ideology as "the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (1971, p.377, cited in Pan, 2011, p. 246), Pan studied different levels of the Chinese education system in search of clues indicating the status of English and ELT in covert educational policies. He observed that in the Chinese foreign language education policies, "there is an absence of ideological resistance to the promotion of English... [although] the ready acceptance of English



in the Chinese language policies also points to some emerging social problems...” (Pan, 2011, p. 260).

Also in China, Xiong and Qian (2012) studied ideologies of English as specifically represented in high school ELT textbooks. “Ideologies of English discussed in this paper are understood as the systematic assumptions and beliefs about the use and value of English and its varieties... The dominant ideology and popular ideology both take the hegemony of English for granted but for different purposes, which distinguish them from the counterhegemonic one” (p. 77). The researchers applied critical discourse analysis as their research approach and uncovered three themes as the underlying dominant perspectives: *selective representation of the history of English*; *shallow sociolinguistic explanations*; and *grammatical prescriptivism*. They argued that these notions are founded on *Anglocentric* ideologies in favor of the assumptions of *neutrality* and *uniformity* of the English language.

These studies in the Chinese context might be better understood against the backdrop provided in Shaoquan’s (2006) book on *The Impact of ELT on Ideology in China 1980–2000*. It investigated the politics of ELT in China in the two decades of its concern along the two lines of sociocultural changes in the country, that is, the spread of ELT and a simultaneous ideological change. With intriguing chapters on issues like ‘The Trojan horse of ELT’, Shaoquan argued that English education in China has influenced the official political ideology as well as belief structures of the people. Overall, the book appeared to be trying to project the message that ELT is politically far from innocent, impartial, or neutral in contemporary China.

Other scholars have also studied ideological aspects of ELT in other parts of the area that Feng (2011) referred to as *greater China*, including Taiwan, Singapore, and Thailand. In Taiwan, Chang (2004) conducted a critical discourse study of language school promotional materials that may convey ideological views of ELT and argued that ELT caused different types of social and economic inequalities in her country. With regard to Singapore, Rubdy, et al., (2008) debated the problem of the ownership of the English language based on the attitudes of Singaporean Indians, and, more recently, Leimgruber (2012) adopted an *indexical* approach in understanding the boundaries of various Singapore English varieties of Singlish and Standard English and how their boundaries might be seen as blurred. As for Thailand, Hugo Lee (2011), investigated issues of social inequalities raised about ELT developed at expense of teaching Thai for refugee language learners.

Malaysia and Indonesia are other countries of the region whose ELT related problems have been considered and probed by researchers. Nair-Venugopal (2000) studied the interconnected issues of identity with regard to the Malaysian English variety in workplace contexts. Rahman (2008) investigated the attitudes of undergraduate Malaysian students towards the English language and found positive attitudes along with tendencies for the standardization of the Malaysian variety of English. In the educational contexts of Indonesia a study was reported about introducing English in primary schools in 1994 (Septy, 2000). Considering that primary school ELT had begun decades earlier in most Southeast Asian countries, the researcher expressed concerns that the late introduction of primary EFL education might *leave Indonesia behind* and discusses aspects of this concern.

In the Middle East, ELT ideologies have been explored in the context of Oman by Al-Issa (Al-Issa, 2002, 2005). Referring to the colonialist and culturalist views as important ideologies that govern ELT in Oman reflected in the official ELT policy documents, he discussed the conflicts between this ideology and local practices. In specifying his conception of ideology, Al-Issa (2005) referred to Marxist definitions like the ones by Giddens (1997), as “shared ideas or

beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups” and by Gramsci (1971), in whose view “ideologies are the cement upon which hegemony is built” (both cited in Al-Issa, 2005, p. 261). He has also studied the English language policies of the wider area of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (Al-Issa, 2011). Moreover, Research has also been conducted on English and Westernization in Saudi Arabia (Al-Haq and Smadi, 1996); the history and status of English in Egypt (Schaub, 2000); and the status of English in Jordan (Hamdan and Abu-Hatab, 2009).

In Iran, Kiany, et al., (2011) explored some macro concerns with regard to foreign language education policies in Iran based on the exploration of some official educational policy documents and Sharifian (2010) has written about *Persian English* as an emerging variety. Moreover, there have been a rather small number of studies on some ideological concerns of ELT in Iran, including those focusing on cultural aspects of ELT (Zarei, 2011) and, more specifically, ELT ideological orientation of imported international ELT textbooks widely taught in Iran (Abdollahzadeh and Baniasad, 2010; Baleghizadeh and Motahed, 2010; Taki, 2008). More recently, Mirhosseini (2015) has investigated ELT ideologies projected and reproduced in newspaper advertisements and Mirhosseini and Samar (2015) have studied ideological positions underlying the Iranian ELT research scene.

In Europe, the continent as a whole as well as individual European countries have been the site of various studies and discussions on issues such as the status of English, the role of English in linguistic imperialism, and language-related transcultural policies in countries such as Finland (Hyrkstedt and Kalaja, 1998), Italy (Pulcini, 1997), The Netherlands (van Essen, 1997), Sweden (Hult, 2012), and Russia (Yuzefovich, 2005), as well as among the Former Yugoslav Diaspora (Kovacevic, 2004). Perhaps most comprehensively, the edited volume by Anderman and Rogers (2005) *In and Out of English: For Better, for Worse?* has examined the status of English in Europe. Moreover, a more recent edited volume (Hultgren, et al., 2014) has specifically addressed ideological aspects of English and the phenomenon of *Englishization* in Nordic universities, including those in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

There have been studies on politics, policies, and ideologies of English in Africa and South America, as well. In Africa, problems of the overall status of English, social stratification of English, postcolonial development issues related to language, and Church language and the religious aspects of English have been explored in countries including Tanzania (Vavrus, 2002), Cameroon (Ngefah, 2008), Ghana (Albakry and Ofori, 2011), and Democratic Republic of Congo (Kasanga, 2012). Similar concerns about the English language and ELT have also been researched in a few South American countries like Colombia, (Manjarres, 2007), Puerto Rico (Santiago, 2008), Brazil (Corcoran, 2011), and Chile (Menard-Warwick, 2011).

Moreover, even within the very borders of English-speaking-countries, aspects of ELT ideology are problematized. For instance, Chun (2009) focused on how the programs of intensive English and English for academic purposes at a university in the US promote neoliberalism and its underlying ideology. Referring to ideologies brought into and imposed on language education practices, Chun called for opening up of the space for contesting neoliberalist ideologies. There are also studies that address ELT beyond specific national or regional settings, like Addison’s (2011) research on how English could be implicitly carrying the ideological *discourse of colonialism* through internationally used ELT materials. Addison argued that “English possesses cultural values which are ideologically charged; these values being subtly underpinned and determined by relations of power” (p. 71). These investigations along with the latter group of studies in settings like Africa and South America that have been less-represented in academic

venues of the field, may depict the widespread landscape of ideology-informed ELT research that, despite relative marginality, shape a full spectrum of related concerns almost all around the world.

## Conclusion

With an ideology-sensitive understanding of language education, mere instrumental proficiency and communicative ability may hardly suffice (Crookes, 2013; Norton and Toohey, 2004). Based on an appreciation of the role of language in shaping learners' subjectivities and its integration with social relations (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007), it may be crucially observed that language educators need to do "more than teaching language skills at a functional level and within competency-based programmes" (Pennycook, 1990, p. 311). Hopes as well as disappointments, beauties as well as dangers, confrontations as well as appropriations (Mirhosseini, 2008), brightness as well as dark sides (Piller, et al., 2010), and conflicts and competitions as well as co-existences (Hewings and Tagg, 2012) need to be considered as real-life challenges of ELT research and practice.

The exploration of perceptions and practices related to these complexities may need awareness of fundamental epistemological conceptions that underlie normalized processes of ELT theorization, research, and instruction, that is, awareness of ELT ideologies. In ideologically-conscious language education, in addition to using language communicatively, language learners, in the very process of learning, need to find the space to think about *what to communicate*. With such a standpoint, tying learners' experiences to the process of language learning and authentic dialogue are valued at the same time that the new linguistic medium is presented (Graman, 1988). The following is Graman's account of the way these higher-level educational values and the new language go together in language classrooms:

[T]eachers and... students even at the earliest levels of linguistic proficiency begin to... connect their existential experiences to the world of those whose language they are learning. This approach to learning a second language which at early stages of linguistic development involves the negotiation and successive approximation of meaning helps students not only to build critically their own ideas and views... but also to build their own words in the new language... (1988, pp. 444–445)

Not only the way language is taught but also language itself can be viewed from a critical perspective. Language, in general, and English, in particular, then, may be viewed as a socially, politically, and ideologically loaded phenomenon (Pennycook, 1998). Avoiding the denial of ideology (Holliday, 2010) under the guise of fostering presumed non-ideological sound pedagogical practice (Waters, 2009a) and recognizing the legitimacy of ideologically-informed theory, research, and practice of ELT, may be a point of departure for questioning the dominant and naturalized perceptions and conceptions in the realm of ELT that tend to be distancing themselves from ideology-informed inquiry and, by extension, from ideology-aware practice of language teaching and learning (De Costa, 2016; Mirhosseini and Samar, 2015). The landscape of theoretical and empirical explorations of issues in ELT depicted in this article may illustrate that calls for critical sociopolitical and ideological awareness are part of ELT concerns in almost all corners of the world. However, further endeavors may be needed towards a fundamental revisit of the mainstream edifice of theory and research in the field that can, in turn, move towards a transformation of the professional and practical arena of ELT.

Despite the divergence of the conceptions of ideology, if it is basically understood to refer to the most fundamental assumptions and understandings in any social practice, then it may

be justified to ask if the widely developed areas of theory and research in the field (second language acquisition, testing, teaching methodology, materials development, experimental research methods, etc.) are ideological. One may hardly answer this question in negative as it should oddly imply that these areas are based on no fundamental understanding. If the response is in affirmative, then, the field may recognize a long overdue necessity to explicate, problematize, revisit, and possibly reconstruct these fundamental understandings. By avoiding or denying ideology, the field is not doing the impossible job of removing them but continues to keep them swept under the carpet. To avoid the increasing move of the field towards a superficially pragmatic discipline with a growing body of conceptual and theoretical obfuscations, we do need to question the widely taken-for-granted bulk of 'the known' (Rivers, 2015) in the field of ELT and to transform its inherent most fundamental understandings.

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