

## The Role of Native Language among the Iranian Immigrants

Eyvazi, Mojgan.

Faculty of Humanities  
Department of English  
English Literature  
Payame Noor University  
Tehran, IRAN  
mojganeyvazi@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:** *Language is power, the power to name and therefore to construct the lens through which understanding takes place. As the most potent instrument of culture control, the language of the host power (country) therefore plays an essential role in the process of immigration.*

*The present paper has focused on Iranian immigrants' strategies to diminish the language power play in the host country to cope with their immigration. To achieve the goal, first a comparison between colonization and immigration is made to pinpoint the similarities and differences, and second some evidences regarding the Iranian immigration are provided. It is shown that Iranian immigrants try to maintain their identity through two main strategies: sticking to their native language and cultural values, and simultaneously gaining a high degree of proficiency in the host language not to lose the language power play.*

**Key words:** *Immigrant, host, colonization, colonized, colonizer*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Colonization as a widespread phenomenon was mainly focused on economic purposes. The powerful European countries took over some weaker but resourceful countries to make use of their rich raw sources. Colonization is harmful for both cultures, because of many negatives colonial rule, including the use of racism and the dehumanization of the colonized people in order to increase economic production.

This perspective of colonial powers, the colonizers, and their motivations are delivered in the form of such ideas as: the change involved in moving to a colony, if one can call it a change, must first of all bring a substantial profit. The main purpose for Europeans embarking for colonies was primarily for wealth; while other possible pursuits including adventure, culturalization, or curiosity were also offered by the colonizers.

The colonized is seen as "other" and inferior. The colonized is portrayed as projection of negative aspects such as cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness, etc. Yet it is also portrayed as exotic, mystical, and seductive. There was an emphasis on identity as doubled or unstable (identify with colonizer and colonized) and a stress on cross cultural interactions.

Regarding the language some conclude the colonizer's language is permanently tainted, to write in it involves acquiescence in colonial.

Frantz Fanon describes the dialectic of language between the colonized and the colonizer bleakly. According to him, "the colonized is raised above jungle status [in the eyes of the colonizer] in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards." (qtd. in Ashcroft 67) Fanon, who rejects the codified colonizer-colonized relationship, advocates total rejection of the standards of the colonizing culture including its language. Fanon believes that "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (qtd. in Deleuze 85). Fanon reasons that he who has taken up the language of the colonizer has accepted

the world of the colonizer and therefore the standards of the colonizer.

The immigrants are on the other hand, the individuals who leave their own country willingly or by force i.e. they have to because of political, social or economic reasons to live and work in a host country whose ideals are unfamiliar to them.

Though these people go to another country for living but they are regarded as the strangers and inferiors by the people of the host country and they have to compromise their beliefs and ideals in order to provide their livelihood. They have to accept the values and the language of the host country to be one of them.

These are the same traits that the colonized is attributed to. So the immigrants are the new version of the colonized. Iranian immigrants also are not exceptions.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

Knowing the language of the host country is a key to enter different social levels for immigrants. Learning a new language is a challenge for immigrants who should face in order to be accepted in the host society, and it is a tool of oppression too for the host country for imposing its power, values and culture. According to Brown the "bilingual intelligentsia" of immigrants must negotiate the power dynamics regarding such tensions as host- immigrant and indigenous-alien (27).

In the case of Iranian immigrants however the tool can't be so powerful. Iranian immigrants to the United States for example are more highly educated than most immigrant groups; this fact, along with the prestige associated with the use of such foreign languages as French or English in Iran, has meant that the majority of Iranian Americans report a high level of proficiency in English. Iranian immigrants as a group display an extremely high incidence of English proficiency, particularly compared to other recent immigrant groups.

It is noted that since the 1979 revolution, however, and thus for the majority of Iranian immigrants in the United States, the attitude toward use of Farsi has reversed itself. This has resulted in a resurgence of interest among immigrants in traditional Persian culture and literature, and a new insistence on using Farsi in public and in private unless compelled to use English by an authority figure (for example, a teacher), or by the exigencies of the situation itself (for example, if one or more people present do not speak Farsi).

It is argued that the resistance to speaking English among Iranians living in the United States indicates a renewed pride in their own cultural heritage as a response to the twin threat to cultural identity posed by the revolutionary changes in Iran itself and the stresses of living in the United States. Just as the native population was able to maintain its distinctive culture despite centuries of invading armies, so in the United States, Iranians seem to cling to their ethnic heritage in the face of pressures to assimilate. Gillis found that Iranian immigrants were often less interested in acquiring knowledge about American culture than they were in learning more about their own cultural heritage (3). Among Iranian American high school students in Los Angeles Ansari found both an acknowledgement of the necessity to acquire proficiency in English in order to achieve scholastically and a resistance of the typical association of language acquisition with value acquisition (4). Among the Los Angeles students and businessmen studied by Hoffman, "American work culture, and perhaps the notion of work as applied to self, such as in the philosophy of self-help or self-development, were the only domains in which Iranians enthusiastically espoused American values" (46).

## **3. CONCLUSION**

The language power play for Iranian Immigrants is an interesting game. Those who feel the stresses of living in the United States or other western countries and are afraid of losing their cultural identity, fight back in two ways: Gaining proficiency in the language of the host country, and clinging to their ethnic heritage in the face of pressures to assimilate.

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## AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Mojgan Eyvazi, Ph.D., is an assistant professor and head of English Department at Payame Noor University, Tehran, I.R. of Iran. She received her Ph.D. degree from Pune University, India. She published three books: *Human Predicament: study of Tennessee Williams' Selected Plays*, Tehran: Kelke Simin Publications, 2008. *English Confusing Words*, Tehran: Kelke Simin Publications, 2008. *Dramatic Terms*, Arak: Falaghe Noor Publications, 2010. Her areas of specialization are drama and literary criticism. Her published essays include: "Man and Myth" *Asian Quarterly* 4 (May 2006), 26-34. "The Feminist Portrayal of woman in Iranian Cinema: The Works of Bahram Beyzai and Tahmine Milani", *Off Screen* Vol. 15( 10), October 2011. "Blanche Dubois's Tragedy of Incomprehension in *A Streetcar Named Desire*", *Journal of English and Literature* Vol. 3 (7), 150-153, Nov. 2012. "PNU Students' Motivational Factors in English Learning" *International Journal of Language in India*, 2012. "Multi Layered meanings in the Poetry of Kathleen Raine" *Luvah* Vol. 1(1), Nov. 2013.