

VoA Special English for Persian Learners from the Perspective of Persian Speakers: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Using modern, electronic technology to promote the culture and worldview of technology producers and to subjugate its consumers is the gist of what McPhail (2006) calls electronic colonialism theory (ECT). As an example of electronic technology, Internet-mediated English educational materials are rapidly growing but they do not appear to have been critically analyzed in terms of their potential hidden agenda. With this concern, the researchers conducted a survey study on “VOA Special English for Persian Learners” which is one of the most popular websites among Iranian English learners (Karimi Alavijeh, 2014). For this purpose, all VoA lessons were closely investigated in a process of qualitative content analysis through which the main themes of this program were extracted. Real samples of the content were included in a 5-point, likert-type Indigenous Iranian Culture Opinionnaire developed by the researchers. After making sure of the reliability and validity of this opinionnaire, it was responded by 151 Iranians who had been selected through stratified random sampling from a variety of educational, linguistics, ethnic, religious and social backgrounds, residing in different Iranian provinces. To take care of the accuracy of the findings in the quantitative part of the study and to meet the triangulation criterion in the qualitative phase, in depth semi-structures interviews were also conducted. The analysis of the obtained data revealed the incongruity of the supposedly “special for Persian learners” materials with Iranians’ values, supporting ECT in the sense that this program plainly serves the promotion of American culture among the Iranian learners.

Keyword: Electronic colonialism theory (ECT), Indigenous Iranian Culture Opinionnaire, Internet-mediated English education, Interview, VoA Special English for Persian Learners

1. Introduction

The Internet and English language education are no stranger to one another. As the greatest and innovation in information technology, the Internet has offered language learners and teachers new opportunities that have never been preceded by other technologies. Among the numerous advantages of the Internet in service of language learning, one can point to the following: the multimedia and interactive capabilities of web pages, which offer games and entertainment alongside texts in English, the increasing ubiquity of the Internet, the high speed of information transfer and retrieval, and the possibility of using diverse information for learning the four language skills in integrative way. Furthermore, using the internet for language learning, one can benefit from the chance of interaction with native and non-native speakers, the possibility of receiving on-the-spot feedback and corrections, and the promotion of autonomous and individualized as well as peer learning. Internet also encourages teaching and learning that are independent from restricted source books and course materials; learning materials are relatively easy to access, and allow users to benefit from abundant sources of information such as online journals, newspapers, magazines, books, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. They provide their users with social networking tools and listservs, as well as various online satellite, TV and radio channels. These elements make the Internet an all-inclusive learning package, which is considerably popular among English learners (Lee, 2000; Morrison, n.d.; Singhal, 1997).

Influenced by the considerable possibilities that the Internet offers to its users, ELT researchers seem to have overlooked its potential threats and disadvantages. Critical views toward Internet-mediated ELT, unfolding hidden agenda in English educational

programs available on the Web (Karimi Alavijeh & Marandi, 2014), hegemonies in technology-enhanced ELT (Lamy & Pegrum, 2012; Marandi, Karimi Alavijeh & Nami, 2015), and colonialism and cultural subjugation in ELT on the Web (Karimi Alavijeh, 2014) have just started to attract researchers' attentions. Such critical perspectives are both relevant and significant, since the Internet has a high potentiality for disseminating Western values (Anbarian, 1388 [2009 A.D]; Jordan, 2013; Le'vy, 2001), especially those of English speaking countries throughout the world (Anderson, 2004; Castells, 2001; Reeder, Macfadyn, Roche & Chase, 2004).

Accordingly, the present study seeks to explore the cultural policies of VoA Special English for Persian Learners, which is among the four most popular English educational programs among Iranian learners of English (Karimi Alavijeh, 2014). Taking advantage of qualitative and quantitative approaches, this study uses the main tenets of *Electronic Colonialism Theory* (McPhail, 1987, 2006) as its theoretical foundation, coupled with qualitative content analysis, opinionnaire development, completion and analysis, as well as semi-structured interviews as its data collection methods.

2. Review of literature

The spread of the culture and ideology of English-speaking countries in the process of English language education has been the concern of many critical ELT thinkers (e.g., Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi, 1990; Asraf, 1997; Block & Cameron, 2002; Canagarajah, 1999, 2007b; Fairclough, 2006; Heiman, 1994; Pennycook, 2007a, b; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2005; Phillipson, 1992, 2009). These researchers have tried to draw their readers' attention toward

the efforts that certain Western countries have made throughout history to establish their dominance over the world through different strategies, such as conquering the lands of non-English speakers, taking control of their educational and cultural centers, dominating their culture, history, thinking system, and lifestyle, and characterizing and representing them in false, unrealistic manners.

The hegemonic ambitions that English-speaking powers seek in ELT have been discussed in various studies as a part of the English “hidden curriculum” Project (Jackson, 1968). Coining the term “linguistic imperialism”, Phillipson (1992) proposed that ELT in general is an imperialistic project, which aims to boost Western commerce, and disseminate Western culture and ideology mainly through global English textbooks supported by Western governments. Hidden agenda in English textbooks markets was discussed by researchers such as Spring (2009) and Ehrensall (2001) who also warned against the threat of Western cultures taking the place of local cultures.

From among a variety of issues in this regard, the following topics represent a number of contemporary ELT concerns: marketing English language information through commercial textbooks as a way of controlling knowledge and presenting it as unquestionable (Battiste, 2013; Parat et al., 2018; Park & Wee, 2012; Proglar, 2011; Spring, 2009), and propagating the US family and social values as well as their social order, rules and norms as they are represented in American English textbooks (Arkian, 2005, 2008; Gray, 2000; Holme, 2003). The most important role of English textbooks produced for use in developed countries is enhancing the spread of the West’s culture (Aliakbari, 2004; Cunningworth, 1995; Holly, 1990; Kakavand, 2009; Kilickaya, 2004; Rahimi & Yadollahi, 1389 [2010 A.D]); Sadeghi, 1387

[2008 A.D]). English learners' frustration with contemporary English textbooks is due to the incongruity of the English culture either with their indigenous value system and lifestyle, or with the local programs' goals and needs (Brown, 2001; Canagarajah, 1999, 2005; Poursadouqi, 2012; Sadeghi, 1387 [2008 A.D]). Consequently, many English language instructors recognize the need for including indigenous culture (Adaskou et al. 1990; Chen et al., 2011; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Hajjaj, 1985; McKay, 2003) or international culture (Bashir, 2011; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Kiss & Weninger, 2013; McKay, 2003; Naji & Pishghadam, 2013) in English textbooks.

As the preceding discussions reveal, one of the main concerns of critical ELT is *textbook*. While Internet-mediated English educational materials are gradually taking the place of traditional textbooks, few studies have been devoted to their critical analysis. What adds to the imperative need for such critical studies is the skepticism raised as a result of the significant investments of the West in producing online English educational programs. In fact, producing multimedia English educational programs, publishing them on the Web, constantly revising, updating, and incurring high costs of domain purchase and site maintenance demands considerable funds. Nevertheless, surprisingly, most of the Internet-mediated English educational programs are completely or partially free (Karimi Alavijeh, 2014). It would seem rather naïve, then, to think of online English educational programs as the generous benevolence of Western countries to exotic *Other* users (Pennycook, 1998, 2010).

This skepticism becomes even more serious when the history of colonialism reveals the efforts of the West to make either colonies, or protectorates or dependencies out of *Other* nations. Many critics

believe that this colonial relation persists, although through modern means (e.g., Canagarajah, 2007a; Giddens, 2000; Hamelink, 1983; Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991). They hold that while countries such as the US still make use of the old colonizing tool, i.e., the military power, to subjugate nations, they also exercise their technological power to dominate the globe. The use of technological privilege by the West to dominate the world has extensively been discussed by McPhail (1987, 2006) in his theory of *electronic colonialism*. This theory is related to the current study mainly in that the Internet is the central aspect of McPhail's theory.

3. Electronic Colonialism Theory (ECT)

Electronic colonialism is a theory that refers to the dominant relation of electronic technology producers over technology consumers, which is established by the importation of communication software, hardware and technicians from the former to the latter (McPhail, 2006). "On one level, electronic colonialism examines economic transactions through which a number of large multinational communication corporations engage in the selling of culturally embedded goods and services abroad" (McPhail, 2006, p. 353). On another level, ECT looks at the social, cultural, and political impacts of these economic activities. ECT argues that these products largely contribute to "attitude formation, particularly among young consumers who seek out foreign cultural products, ranging from comic books, to music, to videos, which represent distant cultures and dreams—products that are produced and manufactured primarily in a totally different environment, culture", (McPhail, 2006, p. 354) and often in the English language.

According to McPhail, the technological dependency of the

electronic technology consumers on its producers revives the same dependence relations present in the colonial era. As the countries at the receiving end of technology transfer import the Western culture via the new technology, they are absorbed by the charm and fascination of the new culture and modern lifestyle. The imported lifestyle naturally demands its new means, devices and implements, most of which are not producible in home countries due to the lack of the necessary technology. In such circumstances, the cultural demands create profitable markets for Western goods, which itself leads to economic and political dependence on the West. Hence, ECT discusses the vicious circle of cultural fascination on the one hand, and economic-political dependence, on the other hand. Tightly interwoven, *cultural*, *political* and *socio-economic* factors enhance each other to maintain the Western dominance over the globe through electronic colonialism.

McPhail points out to the fact that all types of global media, including the Internet, are collectively influencing the minds, attitudes, values, beliefs, lifestyles, and languages of individuals around the world. Internet, similar to other mass communication tools, delivers with it the “trappings of an alternative lifestyle, culture, mental set, economy, or political messages that goes far beyond the momentary image flickering on a screen” (McPhail, 1987, p. 18). Thus, McPhail uses ECT to examine “the mental images, and the long term consequences of exposure to software of all types” (McPhail, 1987, p. 19).

ECT considers mass media as the central reference point of modern Western colonialism. This is mainly since the mass media are the most feasible instruments through which people’s minds can be manipulated, especially at the present time, when the Internet-enhanced media are constantly expanding in terms of

technical power, penetration, and coverage. Mass media are influential in maintaining the Western dominance through the global spread of the Western culture, in a way that ‘media imperialism’ is taken by many as a form of *neo-imperialism*, as a subcategory of *cultural imperialism* by others, and even another term for cultural imperialism by a third group of thinkers and media theorists (Tomlinson, 1991).

Another facet of mass communication policies, adopted mainly by the Western news services, is the misrepresentation of periphery countries as a result of bias and distortion. According to ECT, various periphery countries feel that they are misunderstood not only in the West, but also in other periphery countries that subscribe to these Western news agencies. For instance, McPhail (1987) asserts that the news about the successful growth and development of periphery countries goes uncovered while the news on war, terrorism, disasters, poverty, coups, crime, violence, diseases and the like is abundant (also see Behnam & Moshtaghi Zenouz, 2008; Ghiasian, 1389 [2010 A.D]); Rashidi & Rasti, 2012; van Dijk, 1998). Since a major facet of ECT is *cultural* subjugation, culture in English pedagogy is briefly reviewed in the following section.

3.1. The place of culture in ELT

To study the place of culture in ELT literature, it is important to first define culture. By culture, we mean “the context within which people give meaning to their actions and experiences, and make sense of their lives” with regard to an underlying ideology (Tomlinson, 1991, p.7). No one denies the intertwined connection between language and culture (Brown, 2001; Damen, 1987; Halliday, 1978; Hong, 2005; Kramsch, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer &

Sharifian, 2007; Tang, 1999; Thanasoulas, 2001) and the fact that learning any language implies learning, to varying degrees, the culture of the speakers of that language (Brooks, 1968; Brown, 2001; Kramsch, 1993; Peck, 1998; Thanasoulas, 2001). However, there are diverse views as to whose culture to include in English textbooks; these views are briefly discussed below:

3.1.1. English materials including target culture

English materials containing cultural information about English speaking people make up the typical textbooks traditionally used in ELT (Byram, 1997; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; McKay, 2003). McKay (2003, p. 10) relates this to two factors: “1. English textbooks are often published in English-speaking countries; 2. Target culture is assumed to be attractive and motivating to English learners.” Some scholars believe that English learning is English culture learning, and that culture has always been taught in English classes, even implicitly (Kramsh, 1993; Thanasoulas, 2001).

Tomalin & Stempleski (1993, pp. 7-8) suggest that it is “needed” to incorporate the target culture in foreign language teaching in order to help foreign/second learners

- understand the fact that all people’s behaviors are “culturally-conditioned;”
- increase their awareness of conventional behaviors in the target culture;
- discover how social variables such as age, sex, social class, etc. influence the way people talk and behave;
- increase their awareness of the culture-specific connotations of target language phrases and expressions;

- constantly refine their evaluations and generalizations about the foreign culture;
- develop their skills in locating target cultural points and organize them;
- promote their “intellectual curiosity” about the target culture;
- develop an empathy toward the people practicing the target culture

Similarly, Byram (1993, p. 14) states that when the cultures of the interlocutors are different, “communication is only possible if at least one of them understands the other culture.” He suggests that an awareness of the similarities and differences between two cultures leads to “successful communication and intercultural understanding” (Byram, 1993, p. 15).

3.1.2. English materials including source culture

Certain ELT scholars argue for the use of English materials comprising of cultural topics from the source country for a variety of reasons such as the following: 1. English materials including target culture may be “largely irrelevant, uninteresting,” or “confusing” (McKay, 2003, p. 10) to English learners; 2. Materials from source culture can enhance English learners’ ability to share information about their community and culture with English learners from other cultures; 3. While bilingual English teachers usually find it difficult to talk about target culture in their English classes due to their lack of particular knowledge about the target culture, they can simply manage the source-culture content; 4. English materials with source-culture content minimize the marginalization of indigenous “values and lived experiences” of English learners (McKay, 2003, p. 19).

The source culture proponents argue against teaching English culture for other reasons including the threat of English culture for native culture and identity (Ehrensall, 2001; Holliday, 1992, 1994; Modiano, 2001; Spring, 2009), the one-way direction of cultural transfer (Cook, 1999; Holliday, 1992), the artificiality of English classes (Banks, 2001; Dat, 2006), and the redundancy of culture teaching in many foreign and international settings (Brown, 2001; Dat, 2006). In addition, cultural content in English courses usually presents limited, unilateral and superficial aspects of the target culture (Banks, 2001; Lappalainen, 2011; Pohjanen, 2007; Yim, 2003), as well as optimistic representation of the target culture's ideals rather than realities (Banks, 2001; Bashir, 2011; Ehrensall, 2001). It portrays limited ethnic and cultural groups (Banks, 2001; Bashir, 2011), and encourages cultural relativity, which leaves English learners insecure, hesitant, and skeptical about their cultural values (Brown, 2001; McKay, 2003), and promotes the hegemony of American and British culture (Alptekin, 1993; Widdowson, 2004). In such ways, the cultural content used in English classes seems to enhance neocolonialism through capturing learners' minds (Canagarajah, 1999, 2007a, 2007b; Kubota, 1999; Pennycook, 1998), and promotes cultural imperialism (Holliday, 1992, 1994; Modiano, 2001; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992, 1997, 2009; Tomlinson, 1991).

It is almost three decades that the need for source culture content in English textbooks has been recognized, basically since "it is the users' cultural content and their sense of appropriate use of English that should inform language pedagogy" (McKay, 2003, p. 13). Today, there is a growing concern for addressing this need at the national level in numerous countries such as Cameroon, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Kuwait, Morocco, Chile, Venezuela and Yemen (Adaskou et al., 1990; Aliakbari, 2003; Chen et al., 2011; Cortazzi

& Jin, 1999; Hajjaj, 1985; McKay, 2003). In Iran, efforts have been made to exclude Western cultural values from English textbooks, and include, instead, those of the Iranian nation and civilization (Aliakbari, 2003, 2004; Keshavarz & Akbari Malek, 2009; Khajavi & Abbasian, 2011; Riazi & Mosallanejad, 2010; Sadeghi, 1387 [2008 A.D]).

3.1.3. English materials including international culture

To make up for the unilateral inclusion and portrayal of either target or source culture in English materials (Banks, 2001; Dat, 2006), there exists a third alternative: using international culture, or using a large variety of cultures from English and non-English speaking countries in English textbooks (Bashir, 2011; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Kiss & Weninger, 2013; McKay, 2003; Naji & Pishghadam, 2012). The use of international culture in textbooks is also a response to the cultural diversity of many English educational settings, which calls for cultural pluralism (Atkinson, 1999; Kramersch, 1996; Lazaraton, 2003).

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) suggest that this latter type of materials has the advantage of training learners for cross-cultural communication. McKay (2003) holds that in addition, to illustrate how various forms of English can be used by bilinguals for international communication, such materials can also demonstrate lexical, grammatical, and phonological variations of current Englishes. It can present how English is used to fulfill a wide range of pragmatic functions in cross-cultural settings, where people can observe their own rules of appropriateness (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; McKay, 2003).

In her study about the representation of the target cultures (the US, UK, and Australia) in Finnish EFL textbooks, Pohjanen (2007)

suggested that the presentation of the target cultures in textbooks does not fulfill the expectations of intercultural education. Similarly, Yim (2003) studied the Korean EFL textbooks and concluded that their textbooks encouraged “Americanization” and cultural “homogenization,” and that they failed to promote diversity and a sense of multicultural education (Yim, 2003, p. 185). Both scholars call for employing a variety of cultures including those of the source and target languages in English textbooks. Naji and Pishghadam (2013, p. 93) examine parts of four popular series of textbooks published in a time span of 12 years. They suggest that recent textbooks adhere more to the principles of English as an international language, in that they “generally try to depict more aspects of the expanding and outer circle countries”.

Since VoA has developed an Internet-based program particularly “for Persian learners,” and because its approach, as it will be observed later in this paper, is the inclusion of the target American culture in English materials, it sounds worthwhile to bring this program under close examination.

4. Methodology

4.1. Corpus: VoA Special English for Persian Learners

Voice of America is the “official external broadcast institution” (Voice of America, n.d.) of the US government. It produces a wide range of programs for radio, television and Internet broadcast outside the US in 43 languages for an estimated global audience of about 123 million people overseas. VOA has a special English learning program for Persian learners as well as for Chinese, Indonesian, Russian and Vietnamese learners. They are completely

free and can be retrieved either through the homepage of VOA or directly via their links such as <http://farsi.goEnglish.me>, used for Persian learners of English. This latter website includes eighty lessons broken into three levels of beginner, intermediate and advanced. The homepage of this website appears below.



Figure 2: The homepage of VoA Special English for Persian Learners

4.1.1. Instrumentation

The instruments employed in this study are an opinionnaire and semi-structured interviews, which will be described in the following section.

4.1.1.1. Indigenous Iranian Culture Opinionnaire

In the course of the study, it was observed by the researchers that VoA Special English for Persian Learners is replete with issues

about the American culture, fully explained and exemplified throughout the lessons. This significant exposure to cultural issues was suspicious for a “language program,” especially since this program was designed for “Persian” learners of English. The researchers therefore developed an *Indigenous Iranian Culture opinionnaire* (available in Appendix I) to investigate the way in which the Iranian people related the cultural issues included in VoA to their indigenous culture.

To help the respondents have a real sense of the VoA materials, we exposed them in the opinionnaire to the VoA excerpts in verbatim. The opinionnaire consisted of 42 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale indicating *much congruence*, *congruence*, *partial congruence*, *incongruence*, and *contradiction* between the American cultural issues and the indigenous culture of the respondents. Moreover, space on the last page of the opinionnaire was devoted to respondents’ *more explanations*. Since respondents did not all have a good command of English, the instructions were provided in Persian; all excerpts in the items were also provided in both English and Persian. To cross check the correctness of given responses, seven reverse items were designed. Moreover, the opinionnaire included a variety of cultural issues, which seemed to the researchers to cover both the points that are *in congruence with* and *in contradiction to* respondents’ indigenous culture. This would decrease the chance of marking all items in the same way.

The opinionnaire was revised several times during a process of consulting experts in TEFL, Persian language, cultural studies and research methods. Eventually, in a pilot phase, the first draft of the opinionnaire, consisting of 51 items was responded by fifty Iranians who were similar to the target population for whom the instrument had been designed. After the administration, a post hoc analysis helped screen out the items which had not worked

properly, resulting in a 42 itemed opinionnaire (available in Appendix I). The internal consistency reliability was then measured by Cronbach Alpha Coefficient, which was 0.81. The content validity was also checked by one linguistics and three TEFL experts, who confirmed that items were clear, relevant and appropriate for the purpose of the study.

4.1.1.2. Semi-structured interviews

Thirty-two participants attended the interviews through which they expressed in Persian their views towards the cultural issues presented in VoA for Persian learners. Semi-structured questions allowed for focused conversations coupled with enough flexibility and acceptance without giving the participants a head start in any direction. During the interviews, the participants were put at ease to talk about their understanding of cultural issues; the main themes extracted from VoA, which were also included in the opinionnaire were used to guide the research. The participants were also suggested to look through the VoA website for as much time as they wished, while the researchers were at their disposal for any kind of help. They were rather astonished with this experience: nine participants spent more than 40 minutes watching this program on researchers' PC. Except for these cases, interviews generally lasted about 45 minutes; all interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English by the researchers.

4.1.2. Participants

To collect data, we needed a sample to be a reliable representative of the entire Iranian population, in a way that we could judge the way in which particular cultural values taught in VoA Special

English for Persian learners conformed to the Iranian culture. For this end, we used *stratified sampling* as our data collection method. Iran has 31 provinces with a variety of ethnic groups and their related life styles, customs, traditions, languages and dialects. Usually, groups of neighboring provinces either belong to the same ethnicity or have the same/similar cultural and/or linguistic characteristics (Wardhaugh, 2010). Such groups were taken as one stratum in this study. For instance, there are three neighboring provinces in Iran named Khorasan; Razavi, Northern, and Southern, which were taken as one division in this research. Taking into account the number of people in each resulted stratum and the principle of its proportion to the entire Iranian population, we determined ten large strata.

Since the researchers had access mostly to people who lived in Tehran and its provinces, copies of the opinionnaires were distributed among colleagues who lived in other research strata. The researchers' colleagues were instructed on how to respond to the opinionnaires themselves and their completed opinionnaires were discussed several times until it was assured that they knew how to guide the participants in filling in the opinionnaires. They were also requested to avoid collecting information from their intact groups or individuals, and to distribute the opinionnaires among diverse samples of participants living in both rural and urban areas with various ethnicities, ages, mother tongues, and religious and academic backgrounds.

Although the instructions were clear, the researchers and their colleagues were available while the respondents were filling in the opinionnaires. At this phase, 157 respondents answered the opinionnaire, from which 6 opinionnaires were discarded since they were revealed to have been replied carelessly, especially in

questions that entailed cross-checking. Eventually, we came up with 151 respondents with demographic information presented in Table 1. In addition, space on the opinionnaire had been devoted to more explanations, which was filled in by 53 of the respondents; 32 participants accepted our request and took part in the interviews.

Table 1. *Demographics of the respondents*

	Categories	Number
Gender	Male	69
	Female	82
Age	17-25	41
	26-34	29
	35-43	32
	44-52	28
	53 and above	21
Mother tongue	Persian (Tehrani and other accents)	95
	Kurdish	11
	Azari	21
	Baluchi	4
	Arabic	3
	Gilaki and Mazani	8
	Other languages	9
Faith	Islam	129
	Zoroastrianism	5
	Christianity	7
	Judaism	10
Academic Degree	Under Diploma	12
	Diploma	24
	Post diploma	09
	Undergraduate Student	39
	Bachelor Graduate	43
	Postgraduate Student	14
	Master and PhD holder	10
Residence Site	Rural	54
	Urban	97

4.1.3. Data collection and analysis

All VoA lessons were closely investigated in a process of qualitative content analysis. The corpus was tentatively coded in a process of initial open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), followed by focused coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), where similar codes were closely reexamined for the most outstanding codes, and categories were formed. The categories were then compared, and revised categories and subcategories were constructed in a process of axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Eventually the core categories were unified and the potential themes were extracted. The themes were placed in the context of the lessons several times to see if they actually made sense, and finally the main themes were determined. The main themes of the VoA English learning program revealed to be *female-male relationships, parties, drinking, and picking outfits*. To ensure the consistency of thematization, the researchers analyzed the corpus a second time after a two month interval. This yielded 90.11% of interpretive convergence. In addition, 20% of the entire data was analyzed by another rater who was an expert in content analysis. This resulted in 80% interpretive convergence.

The extracted themes were used both to guide the interview questions and to inform the opinionnaire. They were embedded into an Indigenous Iranian Culture Opinionnaire, which was responded to by 151 Iranians. The respondents' views located on a five-point Likert-type scale concerning cultural issues were accumulated and analyzed. For every cultural issue present in any item, the number of responses on the above mentioned range was counted and the percentages were calculated. Moreover, 53 respondents kindly provided their personal opinions about the issues presented in the opinionnaire, which were taken into account in the analyses. In

addition, data obtained through interviews with 32 participants were carefully recorded, transcribed and analyzed. The respondents' oral and written accounts, along with the percentages obtained from their responses to the opinionnaire formed the data to be analyzed.

In the following sections, samples of VoA excerpts included in the research opinionnaire, the respondents' comments on them, along with their degrees of *congruence* or *incongruence with* or *contradiction to* the Iranian culture will be provided. In addition, samples of the participants' views obtained either from their notes on the opinionnaire or from the semi-structured interviews follow the opinionnaire data.

4.1.3.1. Female-male relationships

The female-male relationship is the most frequent theme recognized in our collected VoA data. It is present in the lessons at all proficiency levels. Here are a few examples:

1. In official forms the word "single" means "mojarrad" (Persian word for single). Thus, if you are not married, you have to mark "single" when filling in the forms, like a tax form, even if you have a boyfriend or girlfriend. In daily conversations, however, this means that you don't have a boyfriend or girlfriend either.
2. Are you single? No, I have a boyfriend.
3. I told him I had a boyfriend, but he kept hitting on me anyway.
4. Did you see that John changed his status from "single" to "in a relationship" [on his Web page]?

The respondents were exposed to excerpts 1, 3, and 4 above

through items 7, 9, and 3 of our opinionnaire respectively. Regarding the viewpoint that the word “single” means not having a boyfriend/girlfriend, 90.72% of our respondents marked the *incongruity with or contradiction to* our culture.

With respect to excerpt 3, 71.24% of the responses indicated that this excerpt was either *incongruent with* or *contradictory to* our culture. Excerpt 4 triggered 53.12% of opposite views, indicating that the concept was either *incongruent with* or *contradictory to* our indigenous culture. However, a relatively large number of the respondents indicated that talking about such issues is *to some extent congruent* with our culture (37% of responses). Since this excerpt displays a practice on the Web, one can deduce that people may tend to overlook their cultural constraints more easily when on the Web. Sample opinions of our participants obtained through their notes on the opinionnaire or the interviews appear below:

In Iran, people are either single or married and the “boyfriend/girlfriend” issue is not that serious.

... making friends with people of the opposite gender is ... is not part of our everyday culture. It has not been practiced among Iranians before and it is not permitted in Islam.

The only relation a man can have with a woman is through marriage, and boyfriend-girlfriend relationship is not allowed in Islam. The Quran plainly asserts that it is forbidden, just like adultery.

Just like “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” which are borrowed from a strange culture, being in relationship is an imported product.

Social networking is like a game with particular terms

and rules, and people who want to play it should play with its rules and use its terms.

I feel embarrassed to read some lessons. I think English learners get used to such things and after a while they may easily express or practice them...

4.1.3.2. Parties

Several parties are introduced, explained and exemplified in VoA such as *bonfire*, *kegger*, *toga*, *bachelor*, *bachelorette*, *Valentine*, *bridal shower*, *rehearsal dinner*, *birthday*, *high school prom*, and *frat party*. The last two parties, are partially cited in excerpts 6 and 7 below:

6. The high school prom, a dance, which takes place in the spring of the third and fourth year of high school, is one of the most-loved American traditions. For girls especially, it is important to get every detail perfect . . . from the dress, to the hairstyle, to the date. . . . The week before prom, high school classes cast ballots for the “prom queen” and “prom king,”. . . . On the night of the event, groups of friends gather for pictures, and then collectively rent a limo to escort them to the dance...
7. We were just gonna go chill at Jen's house. But then we found out Mike was having a toga party, we all went over to his house to hang out.

In our opinionnaire, item 26 reflects excerpt 6, and item 17 reflects excerpt 7 above. Regarding these two excerpts, 89.91% and 73.31% of the responses respectively indicated that these parties were either *incongruent with* or *contradictory to* our culture. The participants reasoned as follows:

We don't have this ceremony. There are some families who allow their teenaged girls to make friends with boys, but they are the exceptions. Most families don't.

Dances, special make-up for girls, dating, and going to night parties are not part of our genuine culture. But these days they are practiced by some young people, often hidden from their families.

Apparently they are vagrants, and their families do not keep an eye on them... They seek parties and they make momentary decisions to go to any party once they learn there is one somewhere!!! No invitation, no permission?!

I don't know what a toga party is, but whatever it is, it seems to entail a mixed gathering of young boys and girls and is undoubtedly against our religion.

One cannot believe that these are parts of a so-called language program for Iranians.

4.1.3.3. Drinking

Drinking is present in most of the VoA lessons and has also received particular supplementary explanations and a variety of examples. A few samples of this theme are presented below:

8. American college students tend to drink a lot, and if you don't, you may be in the minority. If you tell people flat-out that you don't drink, they may think you don't like to 'party,' or don't want to be friends.
9. I don't know about leaving my [drunk] girlfriends overnight at the frat house! But I'll be the DD [designated driver of drunk guests] so no worries.

10. A bottle of nice wine is the most common gift to bring to a dinner, followed by fresh flowers.

Including excerpts 8, 9 and 10 in our opinionnaire, we noticed that these items triggered absolutely no marks on the *congruence* or *high congruence* end of the Likert scale. Rather, items including them respectively triggered 98.68%, 96.68% and 97.35% responses indicating their *incongruence with* or *contradiction to* our indigenous culture. The following two narratives of the participants explain this observation:

Drinking is forbidden in our faith and it does not belong to our culture. Many things that were once taboos are becoming natural in our society...but, thank God, drinking has still remained a taboo.

Drinking is not common in Iranian parties, nor do they talk about it in their conversations.... Wine and alcoholic drinks are used by promiscuous people in general.

I think including their culture into the materials designed for Iranians is part of their soft war against us.

4.1.3.4. Picking outfits

This theme is presented in various lessons, and is also the topic of an entire lesson with the same title. Samples of this issue appear below:

68. 11. The term “makeover” is used to describe a transformation in physical appearance as a result of beauty and cosmetic treatments... More dramatic makeovers that involve plastic surgery or intense cosmetic procedures are often a part of popular . . . shows.

69. 12. I think that top is a little too casual for your date tonight.

I thought it might be a little racy for a first date.

It's not too skimpy for dinner and you won't feel underdressed if you guys go dancing after.

Excerpt 11 and 12 above formed items 12 and 23 of our opinionnaire respectively. With regard to items 11, 39.08% of our responses indicated that the described makeovers as *to some extent congruent* with our culture, while 41% of the responses showed either *incongruence* or *contradiction*, and 19.92% of the responses indicated its *congruence* or *high congruence* with our indigenous culture. Item 23 triggered 79.71% responses, which indicated that the presented concepts are either *incongruent with* or *contradictory to* our indigenous culture. Sample opinions of the participants are provided below:

Heavy makeup and plastic surgery, especially nose surgery are so common in our society that we can say they have become [part of] our culture.

I'm personally used to ladies' heavy makeup in my surroundings; theoretically they are not part of our culture, but in reality they are the culture of many people, especially in large cities. My roommates in dormitory wear makeup when in Tehran, but when they go to their cities they don't.

It [heavy makeup] is not part of particular TV shows, but famous people like actors and actresses usually use it and people imitate them. (Originally in English)

Consumerism, wasteful use of natural resources, and materialism are encouraged in non- Islamic cultures.

No wonder our youth have become interested in strange makeovers these years... They are allured by such programs...

It is interesting that the participants could make a distinction between the indigenous Iranian cultural norms and values accepted and practiced in general, as opposed to what may occasionally be practiced, especially by the younger generations. In addition, their notes as well as the follow-up interviews revealed their understanding of the hidden purposes behind VoA Special English.

4.2. Results

The scrutiny into VoA data disclosed the presence of four main themes, namely, *female-male relationships*, *parties*, *drinking*, and *picking outfits*. The Iranian respondents' opinions, as revealed through the analyses of their explanatory comments at the end of the opinionnaires, as well as the interviews, declared that they could not relate them to their original Iranian culture, nor were they satisfied with the inclusion of such culturally *incongruent* or *contradictory* topics in a program that claimed to be developed for Persian learners of English. Certain participants felt astonished and others were critical towards the English language program presented by VoA. The quantitative results obtained from the opinionnaire, as summarized in Table 2 below, support the findings in the qualitative phase. It clearly displays that a significantly large number of respondents found the cultural issues presented in VoA English contradictory to or incongruent with their values and expectations.

Table 2. *Opinionnaire results*

	much congruence	congruence	partial congruence	incongruence	contradiction
Percentage	1.32	2.64	11.25	23.17	61.58

5. Discussion

The first impressions one receives from the VoA English language program are the following: 1. how abundantly Persian has been used in an “*English learning website*,” 2. how the latter is obsessed with details of the proposed cultural issues. Dealing with these two issues provides evidences to respond an important question: *Is priority given to the American English language or the American culture?*

5.1. Persian is abundant in VoA lessons

Each lesson in this program consists, on average, of four pages of English-Persian sentences mixed together. It is surprising that the number of Persian words even exceeds the English ones in many cases. Counting the total number of words in the lessons under the present study revealed that about 53.42% of all words were in Persian and about 46.57% in English. Although the difference is not rather significant, it is not common in English learning materials, either.

While the occasional provision of the learners’ native language definitely facilitates comprehension, the extra-frequent use of Persian in an alleged English-learning program is suspicious. From the history of English teaching, we still remember how Grammar-

Translation Method (GTM) became target to serious attacks for—among other factors—exposing English learners to a large body of information in their native language. Compared to the VoA English-learning program, one observes that even GTM is likely to use fewer mother-tongue words since its translations are not followed by much extensive elaborations on cultural issues.

The large body of elaborate Persian explanations about the American culture added to word-for-word Persian translations of every single word within the main texts would by no means promote learners' English communicative ability; rather, it ensures that Persian-speaker users of this website would definitely learn about the American culture, regardless of their English proficiency level. Borrowing terms from ECT, one can observe that the American cultural hegemony, enhanced through the Internet, can be traced in the VoA English-learning program, which invests more in teaching the American culture than language, with the latter playing an instrumental role for the former.

5.2. All the texts are colloquial and center on cultural issues

Since the language of conversations presented in VoA English lessons is mostly colloquial, it carries more cultural components compared to formal or academic styles. Given the fact that English is a foreign language (EFL) in Iran, too much accent on colloquial English does not seem to be an appropriate choice; rather, formal, occupational, or academic English is more essential for learners, and informal English is often a matter of personal taste. This argument holds true even with those English learners who want to leave their countries for English-speaking ones, since even for this group, high levels of colloquial English, turned into vulgar English in some cases, is not needed. In a nutshell, everyday-life themes,

expressed in colloquial English indicate that exposing learners to the American culture is a major goal, which can be seen as a part of cultural colonialism.

Another argument is that the mere presentation of colloquial American English would not be that suspicious, had the content of the materials not directly contradicted Persian learners' value system. Since this program is specifically developed for Persian speakers, with the Iranian variety of Persian being the core language of translation and explanations, the materials would be more acceptable had they been appropriated in a way to somehow adapt to Islamic-Iranian cultural values. However, the technological power in the hands of VoA English producers, coupled with their assumed superiority of American culture, has enabled them to spread their culture through their presumed teachings of the English language.

6. Concluding remarks

As the preceding analyses manifestly reveal, the cultural points made about the American culture are either *incongruent with* or even in sheer *contradiction to* the indigenous culture of the people for whom the program is supposedly produced. No one denies that language and culture are intermingled by nature, but we suspect that it is no accident that priority is given to introducing those aspects of the American culture that are inarguably an evident violation of the commands given by Islam and the norms of the Iranian culture and civilization.

Bearing in mind the main principles of ECT, one can notice that in the VoA program, the Internet as a modern technology is used to produce cultural products, such as special programs designed for

Persian learners of English. As such, borrowing terms from ECT, technology at the service of cultural hegemony is a due concern, since cultural conflicts, no matter how serious they may be, tend to gradually shrink in favor of cultural producers (McPhail, 1987). VoA must therefore be treated with more caution because, as ECT holds, long term exposure to such alien messages helps the formation of a new mentality, which is to the detriment of individuals' perception of their identity and national sovereignty (McPhail, 1987, p. 18). The continued reception of these messages, ECT points out, tends to mold the minds of the young people to the ideals and opinions rooted in Western culture and ideology (McPhail, 1987, p. 18).

As the preceding discussions reveal, ECT functions at different interrelated levels, such as economic, political, social, and cultural levels. The analysis of the VoA data illustrates that the latter aspect is more evident in this program. At this level, ECT argues, such products largely contribute to attitude formation, particularly among young consumers who seek foreign cultural goods, including educational programs, which represent distant cultures and dream-products that are produced and manufactured primarily in a completely different environment and culture. This leads to the development of a series of foreign norms, values, and expectations that, to varying degrees, "alter domestic cultures, habits, values, and the socialization process" (McPhail, 2006, p.19).

The main concern is that the process of absorbing an alien culture is gradual, ongoing, and intangible, but the fact remains that this new foreign information will ultimately cause the "displacement, rejection, alteration", or even forgetting of native or indigenous customs, domestic messages, and cultural history over time (McPhail, 2006). This concern was manifestly present in the

respondents' views, arguing in several occasions that the younger generation—more exposed to alien messages through modern technology—is changing the cultural norms and values of the Iranian society. It seems that long-term exposure to alien messages sent by foreign mass media through the Internet, satellites, press, and the like eventually influences people's thinking and lifestyle.

Taking advantage of the Internet facilities and attractions, the VoA English Language Program for Persian Speakers can promote the spread and adoption of the American culture disguised under the label of English education. Iranian users of such Internet-based programs are expected to raise their awareness of electronic colonialism in all its forms, including the potential threats of technology-enhanced educational and cultural products.

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Appendix I

Indigenous Iranian Culture Opinionnaire

Dear respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to help us with our research.

The present opinionnaire means to examine the cultural content of some English materials, through including a series of their sentences with cultural issues. As an Iranian, you are kindly requested to mark the degree of congruence of the cultural issues in each item with your local culture, on a five-point scale, where “1” to “5” stand for *high congruence*, *congruence*, *partial congruence*, *incongruence*, or *contradiction* compared to your indigenous culture, respectively. In items including more than one cultural issue, please underline them and mark their congruence degree on the scale. Shall you have further comments, please do not hesitate to leave them in a space for “more explanations” at the end of the opinionnaire. It is noteworthy that this opinionnaire has been developed as a Persian-English instrument to be responded by a large number of Iranians who may not know English well. It is evident that all the information obtained from this survey will be kept confidential.

Please start with your personal information:

Age: Gender: Academic Degree: First Language:

Faith/Religion: Place of Residence: Academic Major:

English Proficiency Level:

No Knowledge Elementary Intermediate Advanced

English Learning Site:

School English Institutes (How many terms?)

University English-speaking countries

Excerpts مثال‌ها	بسیار هماهنگ	هماهنگ	تا حدودی هماهنگ	ناهماهنگ	متضاد
	1	2	3	4	5
<p>1. Fast food restaurants are rapidly growing in every corner of the town, creating new eating habits.</p> <p>Even at home, people like to occasionally have fast food since they are easy to cook and children like them.</p> <p>۱. رستوران‌های مخصوص غذاهای حاضری (فست فود) که در گوشه و کنار شهر به سرعت در حال گسترش هستند عادت‌های جدید غذایی را ایجاد می‌کنند. حتی در خانه، مردم دوست دارند گاهگاهی غذاهای حاضری بخورند چون طبخشان آسان است و بچه‌ها آنها را دوست دارند.</p>					
<p>2. A bottle of nice wine is the most common gift to bring to a dinner, followed by fresh flowers.</p> <p>۲. یک بطری شراب خوب به همراه گل‌های طبیعی متداولترین هدیه ایست که به یک مهمانی شام می‌برند.</p>					
<p>3. Did you see that John changed his web page status from "single" to "in a relationship"?</p> <p>۳. دیدی جان تو صفحه وبش وضعیتش را از "مجرد" به "دارای رابطه" تغییر داده؟</p>					
<p>4. It's an unwritten rule that all family members must be back home as soon as they're done out.</p> <p>Therefore, parents don't usually need to set a curfew.</p> <p>۴. این یک قانون نانوشته‌اس که همه اعضای یک خانواده به محض اینکه کار بیرونشون تموم شد برگردند خونه. بنابراین معمولاً نیازی نیست که والدین ساعت خاموشی و برگشت به خانه را تعیین کنن.</p>					
<p>5. If anyone needs more wine, let me know. I'll be glad to pour you some.</p> <p>۵. اگه کسی شراب بیشتر میخواد، تعارف نکنه. خوشحال میشم براتون بریزم.</p>					
<p>6. Most students who come from other provinces to the city or town where their university is located prefer living in dormitories.</p> <p>Here, dormitories are sexually segregated.</p> <p>۶. بیشتر دانشجویانی که از شهرهای دیگه به دانشگاه محل تحصیلشان می‌آن ترجیح میدن در خوابگاه زندگی کنن. اینجا خوابگاهها به لحاظ جنسیتی تفکیک شده هستن.</p>					

<p>7. When filling in the official forms, if you are not married, you have to mark "single" even if you have a boyfriend/girlfriend.</p> <p>In daily conversations, however, this means that you do not have a boyfriend or girlfriend.</p> <p>۷. هنگام پرکردن فرم های اداری، اگر ازدواج نکرده اید "مجرد" را علامت بزنید حتی اگر دوست پسر/دختر دارید.</p> <p>اما در مکالمات روزمره "مجرد" به معنای آنست که شما دوست پسر/دختر هم ندارید.</p>					
<p>8. I have a friend who put her dog on antidepressants.</p> <p>۸ دوستی دارم که به سگ خود داروی ضد افسردگی میدهد.</p>					
<p>9. I told him I had a boyfriend but he kept hitting on me.</p> <p>۹. بهش گفتم دوست پسر دارم ولی اون همچنان به من گیر داده بود.</p>					
<p>10. People are regarded as single whether formally or informally before they are legally pronounced married.</p> <p>۱۰. افراد تا قبل از اینکه قانوناً به ازدواج هم دربیایند، چه بطور رسمی و چه غیررسمی مجرد محسوب می شوند.</p>					
<p>11. Free, mixed parties among girl and boy youngsters are not socially acceptable.</p> <p>۱۱. مهمانی های آزاد و مختلط جوانان دختر و پسر به لحاظ اجتماعی پذیرفته شده نیستند.</p>					
<p>12. The term "makeover" is used to describe a transformation in physical appearance as a result of beauty and cosmetic treatments. These treatments can range from a new haircut to plastic surgery. More dramatic makeovers that involve plastic surgery or intense cosmetic procedures are often a part of popular shows. Makeovers usually involve new wardrobes, cosmetics, and hairstyles.</p> <p>۱۲. واژه "تغییر چهره" برای توصیف تغییرات ظاهری افراد در نتیجه مراقبت های زیبایی و آرایشی به کار می رود. این مراقبت ها از یک کوتاهی موی ساده تا جراحی پلاستیک را در بر می گیرند. تغییرات چشمگیر چهره که حاصل جراحی پلاستیک یا آرایش های سنگین هستند غالباً بخشی از نمایش های مد مشهور می باشند. تغییرات چهره معمولاً لباس ها، لوازم آرایش و مدل های موی جدید را ایجاب می کند.</p>					
<p>13. People who are after creating emotional relations go to social gatherings like parties or bars to meet other people.</p> <p>In a bar, a man or woman communicates with one he/she has considered in mind through looking at her/him, initiates talking, and later might offer her/him a drink.</p> <p>If they both feel they like each other, maybe they pass numbers or make a date.</p>					

<p>۱۳. افرادی که در پی ایجاد رابطه عاطفی هستند برای آشنایی با دیگران اغلب به گروه‌هایی های اجتماعی مثل مهمانی ها یا بارها (مشروب فروشی‌ها) می‌روند. در بار، مرد یا زن با شخص مورد نظرش از طریق نگاه کردن ارتباط برقرار می‌کند، سر صحبت را باز می‌کند و بعد ممکن است به او نوشیدنی تعارف کند. اگر دو نفر احساس کنند که به هم علاقمندند ممکن است شماره تلفنشان را به هم بدهند یا باهم قرار ملاقات بگذارند.</p>					
<p>14. –Personally, I don't care much about brands. –I don't either, but designer clothes always seem to look and fit better. .۱۴ – من شخصاً خیلی به مارک توجه نمی‌کنم. – من هم همین طور، ولی انگار لباس‌های مارک‌دار همیشه بهتر و اندازه‌تر به نظر میان.</p>					
<p>15. –What do you do when you're not cramming? –I'm in some fun clubs, as well as some academic student groups. It's fun to me because I can meet people that aren't in my classes. .۱۵ – وقتایی که درس نمی‌خونی چه کار میکنی؟ – من در تعدادی باشگاه ورزشی و انجمن‌های علمی دانشجویی هستم. برام جالبه چون میتونم با افرادی به غیر از همکلاسی‌هام آشنا بشم.</p>					
<p>16. She prefers the involvement of families for her marriage rather than exchanging numbers with someone, dating, and the like. .۱۶. اون ترجیح میده که خانواده‌ها برای ازدواجش وارد عمل بشن تا اینکه با کسی شماره تماس رد و بدل کنه، قرار ملاقات بگذاره و کارهایی از این دست.</p>					
<p>17. We were just gonna go chill at Jen's house. But then we found out Mike was having a toga party. So we all went over to his house to hang out. .۱۷. فقط می‌خواستیم بریم خونه جن استراحت کنیم ولی بعد فهمیدیم مایک توگا پارتی داره. به خاطر همین همگی رفتیم خونه اون افتادیم.</p>					
<p>18. – I have to make curfew at eleven and I can't stay out too long. – Why don't you go home and then sneak back out? – I'll just tell my parents I'm sleeping over at Sara's.</p>					

<p>۱۸. من باید مقررات ساعت خاموشی یازده را رعایت کنم و نمیتونم تا دیروقت بیرون بمونم. — — چرا نمیری خونه بعد یواشکی بزنی بیرون؟ — به پدر و مادرم میگم شب خونه سارا می خوابم.</p>					
<p>19. Our house [Fraternity Association place] is having a kegger this weekend! You should totally come, and bring girls! ۱۹. خانه همبستگی ما آخر هفته آبیجوخوری راه انداخته! تو حتماً باید بیای و چند تا دختر هم بیاری!</p>					
<p>20. What he loves best in his wife is her nice family, commitment to religious teachings, and high education. ۲۰. آنچه او بیشتر در همسرش می پسندد خانواده خوبش، تعهدش به آموزه های دینی و تحصیلات بالاشه.</p>					
<p>21. —What is the color of the clothes you want to buy for your baby? —It depends; if it is a daughter, I'll buy pink clothes, but I like blue for a son. ۲۱. — می خواهی لباس های نوزادت رو چه رنگی بخری؟ — بستگی داره. اگه دختر باشه لباس های صورتی می خرم ولی برای پسر، آبی رو دوست دارم.</p>					
<p>22. Nuclear families in which parents, grandparents, and children live together even after the children get married are rare these days. Yet, parents are still the center of a family and attract their children's attention and affection. ۲۲. امروزه خانواده های هسته ای که در آنها پدر و مادر، پدربزرگ و مادر بزرگ و فرزندان حتی پس از ازدواجشان در کنار هم زندگی می کنند نادر هستند. اما پدر و مادر همچنان مرکز خانواده و محور توجه و محبت فرزندان هستند.</p>					
<p>23. — I think that top is a little too casual for the date you have with your boyfriend tonight. Maybe if you pair it with some heels it will be just right. — I myself thought it might be a little racy for a first date. — I don't think so. It's not too skimpy for dinner and you won't feel underdressed if you guys go dancing after.</p>					

<p>۲۳. - به نظر من، اون بلوز برای قراری که امشب با دوست پسرت داری زیادی معمولیه. شاید اگه با کفش پاشنه بلند جورش کنی درست بشه. - خودم هم فکر کردم شاید برای قرار اول یه کمی زنده باشه. - فکر نمی‌کنم. برای شام سبک نیست و اگر بعد شام برید برقصید احساس نمی‌کنی که نامناسب و کمه.</p>					
<p>24. - Do you know a trustworthy mechanic? -I know a great mechanic that won't try to scam you. ۲۴ - یه مکانیک قابل اعتماد سراغ داری؟ - یه مکانیک خیلی خوب می‌شناسم که سرت کلاه نمی‌ذاره.</p>					
<p>25. Most dorms in the US are co-ed, meaning they house both men and women. ۲۵. بیشتر خوابگاه‌ها در آمریکا مختلط هستند یعنی مردها و زنها در یک جا اسکان داده می‌شوند.</p>					
<p>26. The high school prom, a dance which takes place in the spring of the third and fourth year of high school, is a rite of passage for teenagers across the country. The week before prom, high school classes cast ballots for the "prom queen" and "prom king," who are typically the most "popular" pair in the grade. On the night of the event, groups of friends gather for pictures, and then collectively rent a limo to escort them to the dance. Afterwards, many attend an "after-party" at a house or hotel. ۲۶. مراسم "پرام" دبیرستان، رقصی که در بهار سال سوم و چهارم دبیرستان انجام میشود، آیینی است به نشانه‌ی گذر نوجوانان از این سن که در سراسر کشور برگزار میشود. هفته‌ی قبل از پرام، در کلاس‌های دبیرستان برای انتخاب "ملکه پرام" و "شاه پرام" که معمولاً محبوب‌ترین زوج در پایه‌ی خود هستند قرعه‌کشی می‌شود. شب پیش از مراسم، دوستان برای گرفتن عکس دور هم جمع می‌شوند و بعد به اتفاق یک لیموزین اجاره می‌کنند تا آنها را به محل رقص برسانند. سپس بسیاری از آنها در "جشن پس از مهمانی" در یک خانه یا هتل شرکت می‌کنند.</p>					
<p>27. I'm Muslim and I'm fasting right now for Ramadan. On Fridays I go to the mosque. ۲۷. من مسلمانم و الان بخاطر ماه رمضان روزه هستم. جمعه‌ها میرم مسجد.</p>					
<p>28. Drinking and driving is a big problem in my country.</p>					

<p>People who throw parties will often offer their house as a "crash pad" for guests who have too much to drink.</p> <p>It's important if you throw a party where alcohol is provided, that you take a little responsibility for the safety of your guests, and make sure you know how everyone's getting home.</p> <p>۲۸. رانندگی در حال مستی مشکل بزرگی در کشور ماست.</p> <p>افرادی که مهمانی راه می اندازند اغلب خانه هایشان را استراحتگاه مهمانمایی می کنند که می خواهند زیاد بنوشند.</p> <p>اگر مهمانی ای دارید که در آن الکل هست اینکه خود را مسؤول ایمنی مهمانهایتان بدانید و اطمینان حاصل کنید که چطور به خانه هایشان میرسند مهم است.</p>					
<p>29. These days, young people prefer to enter dating websites and meet their possible love there.</p> <p>۲۹. این روزها جوانها ترجیح می دن به سایت های قرار اینترنتی مراجعه کنن و اونجا با عشق احتمالی شون دیدن کنن.</p>					
<p>30. I heard a rumor that he already started dating someone else.</p> <p>۳۰. یک شایعه شنیدم که او شروع کرده با یکی دیگه میره بیرون (قرار می ذاره).</p>					
<p>31. My girlfriend and I met for two years.</p> <p>We tied the knot last month.</p> <p>۳۱. من و دوست دخترم دو سال باهم بودیم.</p> <p>ما ماه گذشته ازدواج کردیم.</p>					
<p>32. People from different provinces are known for particular moral and behavioral characteristics which are typical of them.</p> <p>They are also known for their handcrafts and natural products which are often used as souvenirs.</p> <p>۳۲. مردم استان های مختلف به داشتن ویژگی های اخلاقی و رفتاری خاصی که شاخص آنهاست معروف هستند.</p> <p>آنها با صنایع دستی و محصولات طبیعی شان که اغلب به عنوان سوغات استفاده می شود نیز شناخته می شوند.</p>					
<p>33. Socializing with relatives and friends is so important that people trouble themselves to go to long trips to visit each other.</p> <p>۳۳. رفت و آمد با خویشاوندان و دوستان آنقدر مهمه که مردم زحمت سفرهای طولانی را تحمل می کنند تا همدیگه را ببینن.</p>					
<p>34. In my country, people are less time-conscious.</p> <p>Americans are more punctual.</p> <p>۳۴. در کشور من، مردم کمتر به زمان اهمیت می دهند.</p> <p>آمریکایی ها وقت شناس ترن.</p>					

<p>35. A woman who gets divorced may lose her social status and cannot be very optimistic about her future.</p> <p>۳۵. یک خانم مطلقه ممکن است شأن اجتماعی اش را از دست بدهد و نمی تواند نسبت به آینده اش خیلی خوش بین باشد.</p>				
<p>36. As a sign of commitment to marriage, engagement and wedding rings are very important.</p> <p>Engagement rings with big diamond rocks indicate social rank and respect for ladies.</p> <p>Men are expected to buy the best and most expensive piece of jewel for their fiancé.</p> <p>۳۶. حلقه های نامزدی و ازدواج بعنوان نشانه تعهد به ازدواج بسیار اهمیت دارند.</p> <p>حلقه های نامزدی با نگین های درشت الماس نشانه شأن اجتماعی و اعتبار برای زنان است.</p> <p>از آقایان انتظار می رود بهترین و گران قیمت ترین قطعه جواهر را برای نامزد خود خریداری کنند.</p>				
<p>37. I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual.</p> <p>I don't believe in organized religion and I have a very personal relationship with God.</p> <p>I pray in my own way.</p> <p>۳۷. من مذهبی نیستم ولی عرفانگرا هستم.</p> <p>من به مذهب های سازمان دمی شده اعتقادی ندارم و رابطه ای کاملاً شخصی با خدا دارم.</p> <p>من به شیوه خودم دعا می کنم.</p>				
<p>38. American college students tend to drink a lot, and if you don't, you may be in the minority.</p> <p>If you tell people flat-out that you don't drink, they may think you don't like to 'party,' or don't want to be friends.</p> <p>۳۸. دانشجویان آمریکایی زیاد مشروب می خورند و اگر شما این کار را نکنید ممکنه در اقلیت قرار بگیرید.</p> <p>اگر مستقیماً بگید که مشروب نمی خورید شاید فکر کنن مهمونی رفتن رو دوست ندارید یا نمی خواید باهاشون دوست بشید.</p>				
<p>39. The young generation is not willing to have many children.</p> <p>They think one child or two is good.</p> <p>۳۹. نسل جوان تمایلی به داشتن بچه های زیاد ندارد.</p> <p>به نظر آنها یک یا دو فرزند کافیهست.</p>				
<p>40. Many people spend a lot of money on buying the most recent cell phones which enter local markets. This is while many new services they provide are absolutely useless to them.</p> <p>۴۰. خیلی افراد پول زیادی بالای جدیدترین گوشی هایی که روونه بازار میشن میدن. این در حالی که بسیاری از خدمات جدید این گوشی ها اصلاً به کارشون نمی یاد.</p>				

<p>41. We got in so much trouble for that party. We made a lot of noise and one of our neighbors called the cops on us. My parents found out about that party and grounded me for a week! I don't want to get in trouble again.</p> <p>۴۱. به خاطر اون مهمونی کلی تو درد سر افتادیم. ما خیلی سروصدا کردیم و یکی از همسایه‌ها به پلیس خبر داد. پدر و مادرم فهمیدن و تا یک هفته اجازه ندادن از خونه برم بیرون. نمی‌خوام دوباره تو درد سر بیافتم.</p>					
<p>42. We didn't want a traditional wedding. We decided to elope.</p> <p>۴۲. ما ازدواج سنتی نمی‌خواستیم. تصمیم گرفتیم باهم فرار کنیم.</p>					