

Acting Edition

English

by Sanaz Toossi

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ENGLISH was co-produced by the Atlantic Theater Company (Neil Pepe, Artistic Director; Jeffory Lawson, Managing Director) and Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director; Julia C. Levy, Executive Director; Jill Rafson, Associate Artistic Director), and premiered at the Linda Gross Theater in New York on February 22, 2022. The performance was directed by Knud Adams, with scenic design by Marsha Ginsberg, costume design by Enver Chakartash, lighting design by Reza Behjat, and sound design by Sinan Refik Zafar. The Production Stage Manager was Alex H. Hajjar, and the Assistant Stage Manager was Gracie Carleton. The cast was as follows:

MARJAN Marjan Neshat
ELHAM Tala Ashe
ROYA Pooya Mohseni
OMID Hadi Tabbal
GOLI Ava Lalezarzadeh

ENGLISH subsequently transferred to the Todd Haimes Theatre on Broadway, and opened on January 23, 2025. The cast and creative team were the same.

CHARACTERS

MARJAN – the teacher; 44; light accent; was taught American English

ELHAM – a student; 28; very thick accent; bulldozes through English

ROYA – a student; 54; thick accent

OMID – a student; 29; barely detectable accent

GOLI – a student; 18; light, sweet accent

SETTING

2008. Karaj, Iran.

ON LANGUAGE

This play, with a brief noted exception, will be heard in English.

Bolded dialogue signifies that a character is speaking English. Nonbolded dialogue signifies that a character is speaking Farsi.

In the world of the play, when a character is speaking English, the audience will be hearing accented English. In the world of the play, when a character is speaking Farsi, the audience will be hearing unaccented English.

For the most part, I have not written out pronunciation. Certain sounds give Farsi speakers a hard time, the most prominent troublemaker being the “w” sound. *Water* might become *vater* if the speaker is not careful. Or especially if they’re careful.

Interruptions are denoted with a forward slash.

[Dialogue in brackets] is to be communicated nonverbally, sometimes because the character does not know the word in English, but not always.

Marjan comes in with corrections on underlined lines.

Prologue

(2008. Karaj, Iran.)

*(A windowed classroom with a whiteboard,
TV, and a desk on which a boombox sits.)*

*(On the chalkboard, in lovely handwriting, is
written: TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign
Language.)*

*(**MARJAN** writes a directive: English Only.
She underlines it.)*

Week 1: Monday

(GOLI stands at the front of the class, holding a small eyebrow pencil.)

GOLI. So I'm starting now – I should start now, right?

MARJAN. Whenever you're ready, darling.

GOLI. In English, yeah right?

MARJAN. English always.

GOLI. Okay. Okay! I'll do my best? I'll – Okay: **Hello, my name is Goli.**

ROYA.	ELHAM.	OMID.	MARJAN.
Hello, Goli	Hello	Hi	Hello, Goli!

GOLI. Oh oh wait actually nosorry hold on –

In the paper

In the paper with the names

The paper with the names says my name is Golnaz

Golnaz is my real name

MARJAN. Which name do you prefer?

GOLI. I do not prefer.

MARJAN. May we call you Golnaz?

GOLI. Golnaz is totally great.

MARJAN. English, Golnaz. I know it's tricky at first.

GOLI. I am very sorry.

MARJAN. You'll get it in no time. What did you bring in for show and tell?

GOLI. Yes.

What?

MARJAN. Show and tell – did you bring something in for show and tell –

GOLI. Excuse me sorry I like Goli for name for me.

MARJAN. Goli it is. No problem. What do you have there?

GOLI. Okay, so I – English okay here I go –

(Holds up an eyebrow pencil.)

This is pencil

Pencil for eyebrow

I want [thick, glam] big eyebrow but I take too much hair when I am young

This pencil is for make not real hairs

You do like *(She haphazardly fills in one of her eyebrows.)*

Uh. Okay.

This is not good I need mirror

MARJAN. You need *a* mirror.

GOLI. I need a mirror oh my god this is super boring I'm so sorry

MARJAN. No no you are doing so well –

GOLI. I thought it'd be cool for some reason to show everyone how to fill in their brows. Because brows are really so important and what if you don't have a mirror? Like what if you're in the car? But to be honest I don't think I can even do it without a mirror.

MARJAN. Don't be sorry! We were speaking English with eachother.

I think it's one of the greatest things two people can do together.

MARJAN. Thank you, Goli, for speaking English with me.

Now continue.

GOLI. I am... I sound...

I don't um I don't know how to say it in English?

MARJAN. I for one think it's nice that you can't insult yourself in English.

Take your time. You are more than capable of expressing yourself.

(Beat.)

GOLI. I like English very much.

When I am little, I like English.

I want to speak English.

Before I speak Farsi good, I know I want to speak English.

MARJAN. What do you like about it?

GOLI. English does not want to be poetry like Farsi.

It is like some rice. English is the rice.

You take some rice and you make the rice whatever you want.

It tries not – What is the word for goes to bottom of water?

MARJAN. Sink.

GOLI. Thank you. Yes.

English. English does not try to sink or get out of water.

English it stays on top of water...it only wants to [bob on the water; stay afloat]

MARJAN. I couldn't agree with you more.

Week 1: Wednesday

(ROYA and ELHAM stand at the front of the class.)

ELHAM. Hello what is it your favorite color?

ROYA. It is red my favorite color.

ELHAM. Red it is...strong. Strong color. Very strong.

ROYA. Very strong. It is strong. I am strong.

One time I carry six boxes.

ELHAM. Okay. Wow. Six.

ROYA. One time big chair. Big big chair.

(Beat.)

ELHAM. It is over now.

MARJAN. Keep going! What a fascinating conversation.

ELHAM. Yes. This is. Scintillating conversation.

MARJAN. Let's try role-playing.

ELHAM. What is that –

MARJAN. English, Elham.

ELHAM. What is it rolling play? Is it on test?

MARJAN. Role play is when you pretend to be someone else.

ELHAM. Oh.

MARJAN. Actually. Has anyone taken the test before?

(No one raises their hand.)

Oh, good! Good. Alright. Why do we learn language? What do you think, Goli? Why do we learn language?

GOLI. Um. To say if we are hungry.

MARJAN. Yes! To speak our needs. Why else?

(Beat.)

OMID. To bring the inside to the outside.

MARJAN. Yes. To speak not only our needs but our wants. To speak our souls. To *speak*. And to...
(Motions at her ear.) listen. To the insides of others.

We're just having a conversation. You speak. You listen. This is just life! Remember that, and the TOEFL will feel less like a test.

(Beat.)

Alright. Elham, have a conversation with Roya pretending to be...Christiane Amanpour. Go ahead, ladies. I won't correct you too much. Interview your guest, Christiane.

ELHAM. Very good okay. Roya, where do you live?

ROYA. I live in the Canada.

ELHAM. No. Here is Iran.

ROYA. Yes. Of course.

ELHAM. You do live here.

ROYA. No.

ELHAM. You do not live here?

ROYA. Nader is my son.

ELHAM. Roya, you're not answering my question.

MARJAN. English, Elham.

ELHAM. Roya. Where. Do you. Live.

ROYA. Canada.

ELHAM. Okay. I'm not quite sure what's happening.

MARJAN. Roya, why don't you go ahead and ask Elham a few questions.

ELHAM. No I can do I can do. Roya why you are like this –

ROYA. You do not ask so I tell you now. My son Nader lives in the Canada [**MARJAN.** in Canada] in Canada. I have permanent resident card.

ELHAM. Wait wait if you have permanent resident card what you do in class? Go to Canada.

ROYA. Nader has daughter Claire.

Claire is the granddaughter of me mine [**MARJAN.** my granddaughter] my granddaughter.

Nader and the wife want I speak in English with Claire.

So here is Roya in class.

MARJAN. What a gift you are giving this girl: learning a new language so that you can know her fully. Elham, what do you think?

ELHAM. I think...very good for Claire.

MARJAN. I'm sure you have more to say! You're a woman of many opinions. It's a simple conversation.

ELHAM. It is like feeling – I think – This is unnatural.

MARJAN. Why?

ELHAM. This isn't how people speak.

MARJAN. How do people speak to one another?

ELHAM. With words. That have meaning. Not like this. I don't know.

MARJAN. That's okay. Let's move on.

Week 1: Friday

*(The class stands in a circle. **MARJAN** holds a large bouncy ball.)*

MARJAN. Things that are green: Go!

*(She throws the ball to **ELHAM**, who will say her words then throw to **GOLI**, etc.)*

ELHAM. Tree!

GOLI. Apple!

OMID. Leaves!

GOLI. Baby banana!

OMID. Pear!

ELHAM. Ball for the tennis!

ROYA. Apple!

ELHAM. Apple was Goli get out of circle –

MARJAN. Okay, it's only a game! But Roya, if you wouldn't mind stepping out. We're doing great! Goli, start us off: Items of clothing. Go.

GOLI. Shirt!

ELHAM. Pants!

OMID. Blouse!

ELHAM. Blue jean!

GOLI. Shoe!

ELHAM. Sock!

GOLI. Jacket!

OMID. Coat!

ELHAM. Tie!

OMID. Windbreaker!

ELHAM.

What?

GOLI.

Dress!

ELHAM. Glove!

OMID. Collar!

GOLI. Glass! Is it glass?

MARJAN. So close, Goli! Did you mean glasses?

GOLI. Yes. Glasses.

OMID. Sorry, Goli.

ELHAM. Winderbreak what is winderbreak?

OMID. A windbreaker is a jacket.

MARJAN. Indeed, it is. Things you find in a classroom.
Go!

ELHAM. Student!

OMID. A desk!

ELHAM. Chair!

OMID. An apple!

ELHAM. Pencil!

OMID. Uhuh syllabus!

ELHAM. Pen!

OMID. A ruler!

ELHAM. Textbook!

OMID. White-out!

ELHAM. Window! [MARJAN. Window]

OMID. Scissors!

MARJAN. Three, two, / one.

ELHAM. Wait wait wait come on –

MARJAN. We have a winner!

(**GOLI** and **ROYA** congratulate **OMID**.)

OMID. Sorry –

ELHAM. Sorry, shouldn't you be in a more advanced class?

OMID. This is the advanced class.

ELHAM. Did you go to an American school?

ROYA. There are no American schools anymore.

ELHAM. Skill level needs to be dispersed evenly in a classroom. Or else it's – it's undispersed and we'll all fall behind –

OMID. I have American cousins but my English sucks –

ELHAM. No. **Windbreak?** That's not true.

MARJAN. You do speak quite well, Omid – I worry you'd become bored.

OMID. I have a green card interview in Dubai next month
so –

ROYA. They're harder on men. With visas and green cards.
We all know that.

GOLI. I've heard that, too.

ROYA. Nader's took years. It nearly killed us.

ELHAM. It may be marginally easier for the women but it's still extremely hard.

OMID. I understand that. I've just. Respectfully, I have a right to think about my future, too.

ELHAM. That's not what I said. I said you don't sound like you need any help. It was a compliment.

MARJAN. Alright! We've been speaking quite a lot of Farsi for one day.

I suspect, Elham, that this may be a good range of skill.

Often, the more advanced speakers pull up the more challenged speakers.

This could be good for you. What do you think?

ELHAM. Whatever you think is best.

Week 1: Office Hours

(**ELHAM** *clutches her notebook as she talks to MARJAN.*)

(**MARJAN** *sets up the VCR.*)

ELHAM. I wanted to apologize for my behavior earlier. I'm not crazy.

MARJAN. You're not the first competitive spirit to come through this classroom.

You're competitive. *Competitive.*

ELHAM. Oh. Right. I sort of lose my mind when I speak English. Not that I can speak English.

MARJAN. You can speak English. Your written assignments are near perfect. And we'll loosen your tongue more. Your accent is quite strong.

ELHAM. Yes, my accent is a war crime. Are you allowed to speak Farsi with me now? I won't tell anyone.

MARJAN. Let's try it in English. Come on. Deep breath in. Deep breath out.

ELHAM. Okay. Very good.

I eh. I take – I taked [**MARJAN.** took] *took* the TOEFL.

MARJAN. You have taken the TOEFL before?

ELHAM. I have *taken* the TOEFL five time.

MARJAN. Five times?

ELHAM. Five. Yes. Your ear is right.

MARJAN. I had no idea. You didn't raise your hand when –

I should have been more discreet. It's, it's...

ELHAM. Word is humiliation. I look it up.

MARJAN. That's a great word. And many students take the test more than once. It's very common.

ELHAM. I am – my school acceptance is not acceptance without good TOEFL.

MARJAN. I understand. I do. The stress.

(OMID enters.)

Just one moment, Omid.

OMID. Sorry, sorry.

(OMID exits.)

ELHAM. Please do not say to anyone about five time.

MARJAN. I would never.

ELHAM. This stuff doesn't come easy to me. Like it does for him.

MARJAN. Omid almost never speaks Farsi in class. It makes a difference. I know it's terrifying but you have to be brave. Be brave in English.

ELHAM. I'm sorry. I just wanted to tell you in my own words.

MARJAN. Would you like to stay and watch this with me? It's a romantic comedy. It would be wonderful training for your ear.

ELHAM. Oh. No. No thank you. I go another time. I have to go. I'm sorry.

MARJAN. It's alright.

ELHAM. Goodbye.

MARJAN. Bye.

(OMID enters.)

OMID. Is now a good time?

MARJAN. How can I help you, Omid?

OMID. I'd like to reassure you: I will be a productive member of this class. I'll contribute.

MARJAN. I know you will.

OMID. I won't get bored.

MARJAN. English please.

OMID. Sorry.

MARJAN. Have you seen this film?

OMID. Julia Roberts. My mom loves her.

MARJAN. My daughter loves her, too. This copy is ancient.

OMID. This woman has enormous teeth.

MARJAN. I love her smile.

OMID. No no I just mean you only find teeth like this in the west.

MARJAN. That's true. They're – what's the word – strong.

OMID. They're sturdy.

MARJAN. They are!

OMID. They could rip through wire. In a good way.

MARJAN. That's right. That's it.

OMID. This is British?

MARJAN. Well, I lived in Manchester for nine years.

OMID. You don't sound British.

MARJAN. I was taught American English here.

OMID. If you want a newer video, I can find a bootleg for you.

MARJAN. Bootleg?

OMID. Bootleg, uh...it's a video – it's when they tape the movie in the theater –

MARJAN. Ohoh bootleg. I know bootleg.

OMID. I have a guy.

MARJAN. Do you?

OMID. Good quality. His camera never falls over.

MARJAN. The camera sometimes falls / over?

OMID. Yes but my guy stays steady, no heavy breathing. All of his are subtitled.

MARJAN. I don't want subtitles. I like to listen.

OMID. That makes sense.

(Beat.)

You know, this is the most English I've spoken with anyone in a long time. And um. I made you laugh. In English. I didn't know I could do it. And I'm happy to be here speaking with you.

MARJAN. Likewise.

(Beat.)

I've found it useful to show films during office hours. You're welcome to watch it with me. Sometimes understanding Hugh Grant takes two people.

OMID. Whenever you want.

MARJAN. Office hours will be fine.

(Beat.)

OMID. Is that now?

MARJAN. Yes.

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