

## A Closer Look at Ideologies Embedded in Imported English Language Teaching Textbooks in Iran

<sup>1</sup> Ali Seidi, <sup>2</sup> Soheila Kabiri Samani, <sup>3</sup> Hassan Fallahi, <sup>4</sup> Farzad Parseh

<sup>1</sup> Department of Foreign Languages, Gilan-E-gharb Branch, Islamic Azad University, Gilan-E-gharb, Iran

<sup>2</sup> Department of Foreign Languages, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran

<sup>3</sup> Department of Foreign Languages, Kermanshah Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran

<sup>4</sup> Department of Foreign Languages, Ghasreshirin Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ghasreshirin, Iran

Corresponding email address: [ali.seidi@yahoo.com](mailto:ali.seidi@yahoo.com)

### Article reference:

Seidi, A., Kabiri Samani, S., Fallahi, H., & Parseh, F. (2016). A closer look at ideologies embedded in imported English textbooks in Iran. *Language Education Studies*, 2 (4), 1-7.

---

**Abstract:** Textbooks are a significant element of teaching English as a foreign language and are the main input for language learners in the process of language learning. Since many various textbooks have been published for teaching English as a foreign language and have been imported to the Iranian EFL contexts, selecting the proper specific textbook is getting more difficult for Iranian teachers and program developers in private language institutes. The important point is that textbooks are not used only to make language learners familiar with the linguistic aspects; rather, they include the cultural and social aspects of the English language. These cultural and social aspects can be categorized as linguistic ideologies. The purpose of the present study was to review the theories on ideology in language learning and then discuss the ideological aspects of the imported EFL textbooks in Iran. The paper also discussed that there were certainly elements of bias in the language uses and social practices, but they were often unseen or unnoticed. Our study showed that there were three major linguistic ideologies in the EFL textbooks which included hegemony, linguistic imperialism, hegemony of English, and globalization. The imported EFL textbooks in Iran represent specific types of discourse including the western cultural, social, and economical norms. These ideological assumptions have mostly been ignored by curriculum developers in Iran in selecting the appropriate textbooks for their educational programs. The discussion in the present study can be useful to material designers, teachers, and learners.

**Key words:** Globalization, hegemony, ideology, power relations, textbook.

---

### Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks are an important aspect of language learning in the classroom context, studying individually, etc. But no textbook is interest-free and neutral. Language programs of institutes in Iran are usually using the EFL textbooks which are published outside the country mainly by the United States and Britain and these published textbooks are a reflection of their ideologies and values and the whole process governed by the policies which are behind these ideologies. Because learning another language is parallel with learning its culture, language learners are deliberately or undeliberately dealing with a range of new ideologies from the target culture which are most probably not similar to their own national or local culture or even in some cases in contrast to it (Seargeant, 2008).

In any language program one of the most important steps is selecting appropriate language textbooks. Textbooks are significant for the realization of the needs. However, "neither a book nor its knowledge is neutral or interest-free" (Christian-Smith, 1991, p. 50). It means that each textbook is covering the cultural values and ideologies as a representative of that society's ideologies or values. The ideologies that are embedded in the textbooks are selected in a controlled based on

the policies that the policy makers follow and may not be in line with the student's ideologies and values. These ideologies may be presented to reach specific political or linguistic goals. Few studies have investigated the relationship between the textbook ideologies and the policies and goals which material developers want to fulfill. The purpose of the present study is to discuss the ideological aspects of the imported EFL textbook in Iran and mentions the most important ideologies and implications they have for language learners, teachers, policy makers and material designers.

### **Theoretical Foundation of Ideology**

The word 'ideology' was first applied by the French idealist Antoine Destutt de Tracy. Taking an aggressive meaning, ideology was considered as the science of ideas. Ideology had the goal of serving and saving human beings. According to Honderich (1995), people can take advantage of ideology in order to avoid being biased and use it as a foundation of following rational rule. Chen (1988) mentioned the view of Marx on ideology who considered ideology as a reflection of a specific group's interests which certainly involves some sort of bias. Lee (1979) stated that the focus of ideology in the past was more on epistemology while there was a change of emphasis later and it recently emphasized sociological issues. Various meanings have been associated to ideology and each meaning can be interpreted based on a particular context.

Generally, ideology includes and covers three areas: 1. Power: Gerring (1997) mentions that "by origin and usage its connotations are primarily political, but the scope of the structure is such that we expect an ideology to encompass content outside the political order as narrowly defined- social and economic relationships, and even matters of religion, education, and the like" (p. 28). 2. Politics: The main realization of ideology is politics. Gerring (1997) believes that politics is interrelated with ideology and not separable. 3. The world at-large: According to Marx and Engels (1965, as cited in Gerring 1997), ideology is a vast receptacle for all conscious and ideational phenomena. As ideologies affect the way we perceive the world at large, conflicting ideologies might inhibit the way people take meaningful decisions and proper choices in life. Ideologies become hegemonic when they are institutionalized by the dominant society (Giroux, 1981). The concept of hegemony is related to ideological issues and refers to a universal thought which is dominant in various fields such as education, politics, economy, and society. Boccock (1986) highlighted the significance of culture, language, symbols and ideas in ideology issues. This was a basis for the emergence of cultural hegemony as one form of ideology.

A language is an expression of a culture and any culture course involves learning about the cultures of the people who speak the language. Language and culture are interrelated. According to Doye (1996), "if language is considered as a system of signs, and signs are characterized by the fact that they are units of form and meaning, it is impossible to learn a language by simply acquiring the forms without the content. And as the content of a language is always culture-bound, any reasonable foreign language teaching cannot but include the study of a culture from which the language stems" (p. 6).

Also in this manner, Fairclough (1989) considers language as an essential aspect of the power and ideology relation. He mentions that "language connects with society through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles of power" (pp. 14-15). Foreign language courses are important tools for political education because teaching a culture to another group with a different culture has political dimensions. Among different languages, English is the most prevalent taught second and foreign language throughout the world. Sergeant (2008) believes that the subject of English is mostly ideology based.

### **Linguistic Ideologies in the Postmethod Pedagogy**

Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2003, 2006) asserts that postmethod pedagogy is consisted of three parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The parameter of particularity holds that language teaching programs "must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p.538). It means that "a meaningful pedagogy cannot be constructed without a holistic interpretation of particular situations, and that it cannot be improved without a general improvement of those particular situations" (Elliott, 1993, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.

171).

The parameter of practicality is concerned with the relation of theory and practice. If we are teaching context-sensitive materials, we should relate theory to practice so that teachers should not be only consumers of knowledge produced by theorists, but they have to teach properly based on conditions they face. Thus, the parameter of practicality emphasizes on teacher reflection and action based on insights and intuition (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2003).

Finally, the parameter of possibility empowers class participants in way that they can have critical reflection on the social conditions (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The participant's experiences are shaped in the pedagogical setting, not only by their classroom experiences, but also by the wider social, economic, and political environment they grow up in. "These experiences have the potential to alter classroom aims and activities in ways unintended and unexpected by policy planners or curriculum designers or textbook producers. The parameter of possibility is also concerned with language ideology and learner identity (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

### **The Importance of Textbook and the Embedded Policies**

Textbooks provide for learners the primary source of new information. Sometimes, textbooks are the only sources that the students have access (Cunningsworth, 1995). The EFL textbooks used in the language class present the initial source of information about language and culture to learn the English language. Cunningsworth (1995) defined textbook as "a book designed to provide the authoritative pedagogic version of an area of knowledge" (p. 2). He maintains that the next most important factor in the foreign language classroom after the teacher is the textbook. Texts reflect the basic ideas about the national culture and textbooks are a flashpoint of cultural struggle and controversy. Textbook is situated at the crossroads of culture, pedagogy, publishing and society.

Textbooks have a range of functions. Richards (1993) mentions the functions of textbooks as:

1. Textbooks as the curriculum
2. Textbooks as sources of new theories/approaches
3. Textbooks as practical time savers
4. Textbooks as aids to untrained and inexperienced teachers

Publication of textbooks is not just based on an educational ground, but the social, political, cultural, and economical aspects are also involved. In third world countries such as Iran, EFL textbooks are usually published outside the country and they often reflect foreign values and ideologies. According to Apple (1991), "textbooks are designed and authored by real people with real interests and are published within the political and economic constraints of markets, resources and power" (p. 46). There are also certain policies behind constructing textbook content. For example, in history texts, the elimination of important realities and viewpoints limit the true understanding of history events for students.

### **The Role of Ideology in EFL Curriculum Programs**

According to the Marxism views, a certain class dominates and controls the interests of the state because this domination is in line with their interests. In this regard, Harris (1982) believes that education and language education in particular reflect the policies of the ruling class or group. Therefore, we cannot consider the curriculum as value/ideology neutral. On a sociological basis, the goal setting, selection of teaching materials and evaluation activities, specification of development procedures are all conducted under the effect of ideology judgments. Actually, the curriculum is itself one type of political activity as its design includes various issues, e.g. value conflictions and opposing positions which reflect the interests of different classes or different economical and cultural distributions (Chen, 1988). Chen asserts that ideology is the knowledge of subjectivism, while knowledge is the ideology of objectification.

Considering the language programs, we should notice that power of ideology is not only at the level of rules, habits and norms; rather, it at a more basic level which is the structure of linguistic form as the individuals' actions are determined

by ideology. Thus, words and action are produced as a result of ideological education (Hung, 1997). The two issues of ideology and power dominance are present in each society and we can see their reflection in social practices as well as language use. Omar (2002) holds that the relationship between language and power is observed in various contexts of society including academic, professional, political, and commercial. There are certainly elements of bias in the language uses and social practices, but they are often unseen or unnoticed because conventions are not often questioned. According to Haque and Khan (2004), “hegemonic conventionalization usually occurs as a result of the order of hegemony, the process by which a hegemonic power is naturalized in a society and subsequently becoming part of the societal ideology” (p. 34).

In the modern age which is known as the age of globalization, different societies and powers use the the notions of inclusiveness in order to create homogeneity and uniformity. Similarly, Haque (2004) states that “with people increasingly becoming conscious of the environment they live in and the ideologies that influences their lives ... at the macro levels, they sometimes tend to overlook the asymmetrical or unequal power that may be lurking or embedded in the micro levels of their social structure” (p. 103). Nowadays, English is seen as the global language. English is not basically manipulative as a language. The problem is the manner in which it spreads. The significant role that English plays as an international language requires a process of language education which includes textbooks, curricula, and teachers. According to Karmani (2005) there are some concerns about the place of English in the current world: He says that:

First is the highly dubious belief that Muslim languages\_ in particular Arabic\_ are in some way inherently programmed to promote a militant Islamic mindset... Second is the classic belief that English... is exclusively endowed to promote the values of freedom, democracy, justice, openness, tolerance, decency, and so forth... Third is the core driving belief that a certain dosage of teaching English can supposedly help suppress a latent radical Islamic disposition. (pp. 264-265)

### **Types of Textbooks’ Embedded Language Ideologies**

#### **Hegemony**

The first one to use the term hegemony was Gramsci (1979, as cited in Philips, 1998), who associated it with a states’ ability to govern through ideology as well as through force. Here, hegemony referred to the manner in which the ruling class of society established their dominance over the masses.

Also Barreto (1998) states that, hegemony is considered as the cultural, ideological, and economical domination of one class over the other. “Hegemony refers to the strategies that are utilized by the dominant class, within the culture of the Superstructure to at least partially provide the ideology that determines social formations” (Baik, 1994, p. 13).

According to Richardson (2007), there are different ways to achieve hegemony:

1. The ruling class pays attention to the interests and tendencies of the group which is under the exercise of hegemony
2. Grants to the public needs and demands are publicized to show the moral and political leadership of the ruling class
3. To maintain the hegemony, the ruling class teaches their ideas and values in public.

So, education is very significant in hegemony. It is even claimed by Gramsci (1971, cited in Richardson, 2007) that the relationship of hegemony is necessarily of pedagogical type.

#### **Linguistic imperialism**

An indication of the hegemony of the English language is imperialism which has the function of increasing globalization. According to Philipson (1992), “imperialism is defined as “ideologies, structures where language is the means of affecting or maintain an unequal allocation of power and resources” (p. 55). Of course in a broader sense we have cultural imperialism and linguistic imperialism is a sub-category of it, which along with media are trying to make cultural and structural inequalities between English and other languages. Ideology is within the cultural part of it.

#### **Hegemony of English**

When we discuss the hegemony of English which is the dominance of English as the global language, we can not assume that this hegemony has been present without the movements and attempts of its native speakers. In this regard, Philipson (1992) asserted that native speakers embed their beliefs and ideologies to speakers of other languages. Also, Philip-

son (1992) mentioned some of main factors in teaching English which have caused the hegemony of English including:

- ✓ Native speakers are the ideal English teachers.
- ✓ The best way to teach English is monolingual English teaching.
- ✓ The earlier English is taught to language learners, the better the result will be.
- ✓ If other languages are used much, standards of English will not be learnt.
- ✓ The more English is taught, the better the result will be.

In expanding circle countries such as Iran and china, it is observed that modernization theory was the reason that fueled the linguistic power of English. The processes that bring about the spread of English have come to be known as modernization. It is stated that the chief reason for the spread of English in these countries is that English is the major language of communication. It is the most important and frequently used language of business, commerce, science, technology, tourism and music.

### **Globalization**

Globalization is a loan from the science of economics. Defining globalization is a difficult task. Globalization is a word describing the continuously raising connections and communications among people regardless of their nationality and geographical condition. Rothenberg (2003) defines it as “the acceleration and intensification of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nation (p.3). According to Hjarvard (2004), globalization is a huge revolution in our time which results from the effect of technological developments on time, space, and experiences of humans. Regardless of the vast changes that globalization has had on different aspects of human life, it has also changed the way people understand the world and think in about events and each other. Rothenberg (2003) states that there are various views on globalization and its impact on local cultures and local education programs. He asserts that globalization is seen by local cultures as westernization or Americanization in particular as western powers or the United States are the world superpowers and use their power to dominate other nations in various fields including politics, economy, and education. Hence, the use of English as a global language can render this aim. Hjarvard (2004) mentions “linguistic genocide” and criticizes globalization. He says that “over the past two or three decades, English has occupied a singular position among languages. Today it has become a world language, the language people use to communicate with others outside their own linguistic community. English has become the lingua franca of the global network” (p.79).

### **Conclusion**

The present study claims that although textbooks are believed to provide objective facts and materials, ideological assumptions are embedded in them and English language teaching textbooks imported in Iran are no exception. Our study showed that there were three major linguistic ideologies in the EFL textbooks which included hegemony, linguistic imperialism, hegemony of English and globalization. Richards (2001) also noted this point and asserted that textbooks are a significant element of teaching English as a foreign language and are the main input for language learners in the process of language learning. The important point is that textbooks are not used only to make language learners familiar with the linguistic aspects; rather, they include the cultural and social aspect of the English language. These cultural and social aspects can be categorized as linguistic ideologies. For instance, it seems that the imported EFL textbooks in Iran represent a specific type of discourse that is the western cultural, social, economical norms. These ideological assumptions have mostly been ignored by curriculum developers in Iran in selecting the appropriate textbooks for their educational programs. Our stance was in line with Akbari (2008) stating that:

The majority of coursebooks used for English instruction have been anesthetized to make them politically and socially harmless for an international audience. Most publishers advise coursebook writers to follow a set of guidelines to make sure that controversial topics are kept out of their books (...). As a result, most coursebooks deal with neutral, apparently harmless topics such as food, shopping, or travel. (p. 267)

Our view is also consistent with Fairclough (1989) who asserts that in modern society, the exercise of power is achieved increasingly by ideological workings of language. In fact, language has found an important place in social processes among the different communication modes (Haque, 2004). Controlling the society discourse, and language discourse in particular, facilitates getting the power to control and shape the society ideology.

The discussion in the present study can be useful to material designers, teachers, and learners. Material designers and curriculum planners are hoped to take advantage of these points by more noticing the ideological aspects of the imported EFL textbooks in Iran and selecting the textbooks that are in line with the learners' social and cultural norms in the process of language learning. This view is consistent with Pennycook (1994) who asserted that "schools are not neutral sites where a curricular body of information is passed on to students and educational institutions are cultural and political arenas in which different values are in struggle" (p. 297). This implies that languages and the process of language learning are related to beliefs, opinions and ideologies and thus language can be used for purposes besides language learning. Ideological transmission is one of such purposes and our study holds that language teachers and material designers should raise their awareness that language textbooks are neutral and ideology-free.

## References

- Akbari, R. (2008). Transforming lives: Introducing critical pedagogy into FL classrooms. *ELT Journal*, 62, 276-283. doi:10.1080/09571739385200161
- Apple, M. W., & Christian-Smith, L. K. (1991). The politics of the textbook. In M. W. Apple & L. K. Christian-Smith (Eds.), *The politics of the textbook* (pp.1-22). London and New York: Routledge.
- Baik, M. J. (1994). *Language, ideology, and power: English textbooks of two Koreas* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Illinois, U.S.A.
- Barreto, A. (1998). *Colonialism: Political economy, language and ideology in Puerto Rico* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Faculty of the Union Institute, Puerto Rico.
- Bocock, R. (1986). *Hegemony*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Chen, B.C. (1988). *A study of hidden curriculum*. Taipei: Wunan Press.
- Christian-Smith, L. K. (1991). Texts and high-tech: Computer, gender, and book publishing. In M. W. Apple, & L. K. Christian-Smith (Eds.), *The policies of textbooks* (pp. 46-70). New York: Rutledge.
- Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your coursebook*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Doye, P. (1996). Foreign language teaching and education for intercultural and international understanding. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 10, 104-112. doi:10.2307/328584
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Gerring, J. (1997). Ideology: A definitional analysis. *Political Research Quarterly*, 50(4), 957-994. doi:10.2307/358746.
- Giroux, H.A. (1981). *Ideology, culture, and the process of schooling*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hjarvard, S. (2004). The globalization of language: How the media contribute to the spread of English and the emergence of the medialect? *Nordicom Review*, 1, 75-97.
- Haque, M. S. (2004). Discourse of power in recruitment advertisements, *The Gombak Review: A Journal of Language and Literature*, 6(2), 98-115. doi:10.1080/0958822920050303.
- Haque, M. S., & Khan, M. H. (2004). Language and order of hegemony in society: CDA perspectives. *NSU Studies in Language and Literature*, 2(4), 30-48.
- Harris, K. (1982). *Teachers and classes: A Marxist analysis*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Hung, L. D. (1997). *The cross-century of Marxism*. Taipei: Wunan Press.
- Honderich, T. (1995). *The Oxford companion to philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Karmani, S. (2005). English, terror, and Islam. *Applied Linguistics*, 26(2), 262-267. doi:10.2307/326879.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a postmethod pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(4), 537-60. doi: 10.2307/2F3588427.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). A postmethod perspective on English language teaching. *World Englishes*, 22, 539-550. doi: 10.1111/2Fj.1467-971X.2003.00317.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding language teaching: From method to post-method*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.
- Lee, E.Y. (1979). *Dictionary of ideology*. Taipei: Yue Se Press.
- Maftoon, P., Sarem, S. N., & Hamidi, H. (2012). A closer look at different aspects of language teaching/learning and learner identity. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2 (6), 1160-1167. doi:10.4304/tpls.2.6.1160-1167.
- Omar, A. (2002). *Language and power*. New Straits Times.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. New York: Longman.
- Philips, S. V. (1998). Language ideologies in institutions of power: A commentary. In B. B. Schiefflin, A. K. Woolard, & P. V. Kroskirty (Eds), *Language ideologies* (pp. 211-229). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Philipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (1993). Beyond the textbook: The role of commercial material in language teaching. *RELC Journal*, 24(1), 1-4.
- Richards, J.C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Richardson, J. E. (2007). *Analyzing newspapers: An approach from critical discourse analysis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rothenberg, L. E. (2003). *Globalization 101: The three tensions of globalization*. New York: The American Forum of Global Education.
- Seargeant, P. (2008). Language, ideology, and English within a global context. *World Englishes*, 27(2), 217-232. doi:10.1017/S0261444800008879.