

CULTURE AND RELIGION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS USED AT PRIMARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN KARNATAKA OF INDIA

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Abstract:

A language with a political process at its core is 'a historical construct' connecting the sociopolitical economic order. It is an expression of culture that primarily acts as the deposit of the value belief system termed as ideology. Thus "language is a marker of ideology."

In the similar lines, English as a language and its teaching is predominantly ideology-led. It is widely established that the global spread of the English language is neither natural nor value neutral. Aided by the 'hidden hands' the spread is the result of the "cultural construct of colonialism" (Pennycook, A.1998). Deeply rooted in the expansion of colonial British empire teaching English is treated as a means of 'spiritual subjugation' (Nguagi, 1987).

Textbooks as the sources of language in the ESL classroom play a crucial role in teaching English. English textbooks as the major source of language are "cultural and commercial artifacts" and are a reflection of the ideologies embedded in the language and curriculum. (Van Dijk, T. 1993). English language textbooks thus carry the ideological and socio-economic overtones with cultural propaganda of the English. (Pennycook, A. 2000).

Though the existing research suggests that the textbooks prepared by the 'center' promote western ideology and the hegemony of capitalism subtly there are hardly few studies that investigate the ideological intent of textbooks prepared by the 'periphery'.

The present study intends to unmask the ideological messages embedded in the English language textbooks prescribed by the state board of Karnataka for use at primary school level by using the theoretical underpinnings of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as both a theory and a methodology to unearth the opaque structural relationship of the social inequalities, discriminations, and dominance manifested in language. (Wodak, R. 1995). The CDA of English textbooks reveals that they are embedded in the dominant Hindu religious values and themes.

Keywords: Culture and Religion, English Language, Primary level etc

Introduction:

The claim that a language is a value-neutral and apolitical tool comfortably ignores that any language is 'a weightless way of carrying the world around' (Eagleton, T., 1996, P.73). It isolates language from the society reducing it to a mere string of structured words though bounded by certain principles. In fact "Language is a carrier of values and beliefs fashioned by a people over a period of time," (72) rooted in a specific history.

Language connects and constructs the human intellect in respect to the dominant social structure/order through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being a site of, and a stake in, struggles of power (Fairclough, 1989). Language is a part of the social and indeed an active element in its construction (Cameron, 1995). This language is so distinctly a social phenomenon that plays a vital role in socialization and the "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Immersed in the experiences of society and inextricably bound with thought language acts as the sensibility or the practical consciousness of that society. The sensibility through schema development permeates individual consciousness forming their world view with fixed mental processes and value judgments.

In other words, language is ideological in nature perpetrating values of certain kind favoring a social system/order. Thus every language is "a marker of *an* ideology" determining a social order (Spitulink, 1998) carrying a culture. A language is deeply political and ideological as it is the "storehouse of the cluttering of the ideological spider web." (Mey, 1985). In this way language is a political ideology in addition to just reflecting an institution and power, produces and reproduces a socio-economic structure along with its culture.

Politics of Global Spread and Rise of English:

The present unassailable global status of English as the natural and neutral language of opportunities, modernity, and development is a "cultural construct of colonialism." analyzing the politics behind the spread of colonial language Ngugi (1987) opined that language (*English*) is the "most important vehicle through which the power fascinated and held the soul prisoner' and as the means of 'spiritual subjugation.' The status of English, however, is still continued through the contemporary social relations of production/economy. In addition to the cultural and ideological means, English is also promoted rather enforced through various structural means, i.e., social and economic means. The policy of Liberalization Privatization Globalization (L.P.G.) has furthered the colonial logic of lingua franca and language of opportunities enforcing the teaching and learning of English. And so at present English language teaching enjoys a neocolonial status. Pennycook, (2000) unveiling the myth of global status of English cautions us to be aware of the ideological and socio-economic overtones of English and not to fall in the trap of it as a neutral medium for the conveyance of knowledge and culture. Thus English is not just a communication tool as it is opined by the

dominants, it reflects, represents as well as reproduces a social structure; a cultural, political, and economic model embedded in it.

English language teaching (ELT) as an extension is "an international political activity with political, economic, military and cultural implications and ramifications." Phillipson, R (1992) (8). It can be essentially concluded that the ELT profession is characterized by the values, ideas, purposes, and activities that maintain the English language hegemony by preserving the dominant status of the English language.

The textbook is Cultural and Ideological Artifacts:

The textbook is a "book designed to provide an authoritative and pedagogic version of an area of knowledge." Textbook thus acts as an authority of knowledge in the classroom. They are an 'expert source' available for teachers as well as students. Textbooks are cultural and commercial artifacts (Apple 1984; Liu 05; Canagarajah, 2003). They enforce a cultural coherence as they are primary sources of information on culture and language that are intimately connected. Texts contribute to the construction of a specific social reality concerning the family institution, concerning gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Even simple activities like reading and writing which are done in the daily classroom are also forms of regulation of social relations of production immersed in a political system. Apart from the narrowly technical explicit curriculum that contains grammar, vocabulary and communication skills comprising L.S.R.W.; any curriculum also contains a hidden agenda of construction of a social being infused with certain values, ideologies, and thinking. It exercises an influencing effect in the day to day life for a lifelong concerning every event, practice, an issue. And thus textbooks are ideologies embedded in the curriculum (Van Dijk, 1993).

Dendrinos (1992) posits that the language of the English textbooks in a foreign language context is not merely an instrument for constructing learners as subjects of the educational institution but for positioning them as particular social subjects, by involving them in the creation of social meanings through the presentation of particular social reality. EFL textbooks portray a reality of the will and freedom of individuals who are alone in shaping their life in any way they choose, i.e. individualistic values as opposed to community values. These social values are not merely conveyed through themes dealt in the text but it also embraces the language that a text comprises. Other features of text such as grammatical features and cohesion devices also transmit values. (Fairclough, 1989). It needs to remember that Reading the world is always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually the world. This whole set of complex relations can be abridged as the values are interrelated with power and text construction and meaning.

During the colonial times, the advent of English was associated with the importation of knowledge from the 'center' that defined the hidden curriculum determining the nature and functioning of regular teaching and learning in the classrooms. As the major source of schooling during colonial times was Christian missionary schools, the English language and its ideology have always been associated with the Christian religion. In addition, even when the English literary studies were introduced the English curriculum was dominated by the canonic British literature which carried the literature that is associated with the bible and biblical myths. However at present in the post-colonial times in India the ideology that determines the hidden curriculum of English needs a thorough probe to uncover the ideology of the textbooks.

Past Research:

A plethora of knowledge is produced examining the ideology and culture of textbooks in general, EFL (English as Foreign Language) and ESL (English as Second Language) textbooks in particular. Giaschi (2000) in his critical analysis of images in contemporary textbooks found that the textbooks carried a 'cultural propaganda' packed with an ideology. Taki (2008) in his analysis found out that internationally-distributed textbooks tend to represent a particular discourse type, i.e. the discourse of western economy and consumerism.

Dr. Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh and Somayeh Baniasad (2010) in their research investigated the ideological prompts present in the imported instructional English textbooks in Iran and the learners as well teacher's attitudes towards the ideologies and English. The most prevalent ideologies in the imported textbooks are hegemony of English, sexism, and cultural stereotypes. Consumerism was introduced through introducing entertainment, fashion, shopping, and technology. Sexism is seen through the omission of females in textbooks. Hegemony is not only depicted through the portrayal of the superiority of English but also the superiority of US, English people, English culture, English artists, and English customs. Regarding attitudes and awareness of ideologies in the textbooks, institute teachers are found to be aware of the ideologies but they were not very much concerned with teaching or raising awareness about them.

Dr. S. Baleghizadeh and M. Jamali Motahed (2010) in their critical discourse analysis of the ideological content of internationally developed British and American ELT textbooks of Upper-intermediate students' suggest that British textbooks, in terms of content, tend to entertain the students while American textbooks lay more emphasis on occupational and business-related issues placing learners in market economy relations. Concerning relations, characters in the conversations were placed in socially almost equal roles. Moreover, inequalities were rarely in the interactions and there was little attempt to make learners aware of issues such as dialogue management strategies.

Tajima. M (2011), analysis of Japan junior high school students' textbooks, i.e. C21 using critical discourse analysis as an analytical framework revealed that C21's US-only orientation and dichotomous representation of Japanese and US culture. It also pointed out that classroom discursive practice can either reproduce these features or challenge and resist them. Kim (2012) examined the cultural and social bias of EFL textbooks used across the public as well as private middle schools in South Korea.

This makes it very clear that apart from the narrowly technical content to learn the language, all teaching materials, be it selected or adapted or designed, carry cultural and ideological messages. Ideological content is integrated into textbooks in the form of texts, dialogues, and exercises. English textbooks which are largely focusing on just linguistic aspects of English, in which the role of content is completely neglected or deliberately hidden, function as a form of hegemonic cultural politics by inclusion or by the exclusion of aspects of social, economic, political or cultural reality.

There is an abundant knowledge available with particular reference to the area of the study, i.e., the ideology of English language textbooks. It is also evident from the existing body of knowledge that the textbooks prepared by the experts from center promote western ideology and the hegemony of capitalism. However, in the particular context of India, there are hardly any studies that focus on analyzing the ideology of English textbooks that are prepared by experts from the periphery that is from India. In the Indian context, the studies on the ideology of textbooks have been confined to analyzing the history textbooks but not the English language textbooks. This study attains importance as this focuses on the ideological aspects rather than the technical aspects of the language of the textbooks.

The objective of the Research:

- Investigating the ideological overtones of the English language textbooks prescribed for class I, II and III in the state of Karnataka of India with particular reference to the representation of culture and religion in the texts will be the prime objective of the study.

Methodology:

The study analyses the schools English textbooks circulated by the government of Karnataka for class 1, 2 and 3. The study analyses the readers but not the activity books that contains practice exercises and activities as an extension to the textbooks. The textbook is analyzed using critical discourse analysis. Using thick description the analysis is described.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):

It uncovers the implicit ideologies embedded in the texts (Widdowson, 2000). It explores the intricate relationship between the language, texts, and social values and lays naked the

ideology of the society embedded in power. The purpose of CDA is to analyze "opaque as well as the transparent structural relationship of dominance, discrimination, power, and control manifested in the language." (Woodak, 1995; 204). It is concerned with the value belief as well as value judgment systems that govern the construction and interpretation of textbooks.

This study adopts the framework defined by Fairclough (1989). The framework operates by analyzing text from three aspects namely content, social relation, and subject positions. However given the confines of this study as it involves the analysis of textbooks used at the primary level, only one aspect of the framework that is content is adapted for analysis. Content with particular reference to the representation of religion is studied. Further elaborating the aspect of the framework, content includes in the particular context of this research the themes of the stories, names, and characters present in the texts as well as exercises, symbols of religion such as holy places and gods pictures present in the textbook and the cultural festivals that are mentioned in the textbook.

Analysis:

A preliminary look at the textbooks reveals that the textbooks contain aspects of religious values. Three textbooks of classes 1, 2 and 3 contain aspects of religion in various forms. The aspects that contain the religious values are analyzed below.

Stories:

In the textbook of class 1, unit 4 contains a story from Hindu mythology- the story is about Lord Krishna and his friend Sudhama. This story is from one of the religious epics Mahabharata which is revered as a principle religious text of Hindu. The storyline is about a king and his poor friend whose king comes to the help of a poor friend by helping in hard times.

The listening text in the same unit includes a story titled the power of *Sanjeevini* (page.57). The story is an excerpt taken from the Ramayana depicting an incident of the battle between Rama and Raavan.

The textbook of class2, unit 7 begins with the story of Parashurama, the teacher and his disciple, Karna. The story containing these both characters are from the epic Mahabharata. In addition, the same unit contains another story as the reading text. The reading text contains the story from the Mahabharatha depicting the relation between teacher and disciple. The characters represented in the story are namely the great sage Dhoumya and his student Aruni.

In the same book in unit 10, titled Purana Dasa part 2, also contains the story depicting the story of a businessman and lord Vittala. It narrates the life story of a miser businessman who later became a devotee and went onto donate money to the others. The businessman, Srinivas later went on to become the father of Carnatic music singing in praise of the Lord Vishnu.

Pictures:

In unit 1 of a textbook of class 1, the section of 'Let Us Speak,' the students are given a series of pictures in which the students are asked to explain their daily routine. The third picture in which a young boy prays to a Hindu God-Ganesh picture. (Page 6).

In unit 4 also in the section let us listen to a series of pictures are given depicting the incidents of the epic Ramayana. The teacher is asked to narrate while the students the students are instructed to listen (Page 43). In the same unit, a picture of Lord Krishna is given and the students are asked to color it (Page 46). In the same textbook in unit VII the section let us begin in addition to the picture of young people and various games contain an image of a Hindu temple (Page 90).

The textbook of class 2 in unit 4 an image of a temple and idol of Lord Shiva is presented (Page 55). In the same textbook in unit 10, titled A School Trip to Hampi the picture of a temple is provided as an overview of the entire place (Page 111). In the same unit following the previous page some more pictures of Hindu temples and Hindu idol are presented (Page 112). While in part 2 of the same unit, in the beginning, a series of pictures of different religious shrines such as beginning with the temple, mosque, church, gurudwar, and mantapa are given (Page 118). In the same unit in the section let us enjoy students are provided with a series of pictures and are instructed to rearrange and complete the story. The pictures typically refer to a story set in olden times representing the situation of gurukul narrating a conversation between a guru and shishya (Page 124).

Names and characters in the stories and exercises:

Almost all the characters in the stories and other sections of the unit in three textbooks are representatives of names that are given to children born into Hindu families. In the textbook of class, I the unit II titled People around Me describes a Hindu family as the pictures and the names given depict the members of a Hindu family. In the same unit section titled let us read also depicts characters representing a Hindu family represented by their names.

In the textbook of class 2, in the beginning wherein suggestions are provided for teachers, under the theme culture and heritage a picture of god statue that is a Hindu god is given.

In the textbook of class 3, unit 8 contains an imaginary conversation between two frogs. The two frogs are also named as Venkata Kappe and Narayana Kappe.

Historical characters representing the old times of kings can also be found in the textbooks. In class 2 unit 9 and 10 contains a reference to such historical figures. Unit 9 is a story about the Muslim king Akbar and his courtier Birbal while the next unit 10 has a reference to the king Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara empire (Page 111).

However in the three textbooks, one hardly finds the names and characters representing different religions. In the textbook of class 1 in unit 2, in one of the dialogues given after the text a Muslim name, Halim is mentioned twice in the same line. (Page 19). In the same textbook in unit 3 titled Just Being Kind; the exercise no 3 in the section let us speak contains names such as Feroz and Cathy in addition to the other names. (Page 33).

Cultural festivals:

In the textbooks of class 2, the first unit contains a prose section on Raksha Bandhan and a poem on the same topic. Raksha Bandhan is a festival of Hindus that celebrates the love of brother and sister. The prose titled Raksha Bandhan narrates a story from the Mahabharata. The story is followed by a conversation between two girls about the same festival

Culture and Religion of English Language Textbooks:

India is a multicultural and multi-religious country and so the Indian classroom in general and Karnataka classroom, in particular, represents the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of the learners. The typical classroom contains students with various religious faiths. These textbooks ridden with Hindu ideology creates an alienating effect creating a culture of exclusion for the students coming from non Hindu backgrounds as they cannot identify themselves with the stories, characters, names or From the analysis of Stories, Pictures, Names and characters in the stories and exercises and Cultural festivals in the textbooks of class 1, 2 and 3 it is obvious that the textbooks contain religious values. The analysis evidently reveals findings contrary to the popular beliefs as well as the established literature regarding the ideology of English language in concern with culture and religion. The previous literature has unanimously stated that the English language and English literary studies are biased towards Christianity and biblical myths but the analysis has revealed that the textbooks contain Hindu religious values and themes.

Stories taken from Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Hindu scriptures are made part of the textbooks. Since the two are religious epics of Hindus and other story is Hindu religion-oriented it can be concluded that the stories represent Hindu religious values.

Pictures presented in the textbooks other than the pictures of animals, flowers, and nature-related, the pictures and symbols of Hindus can be seen at a major scale. The pictures, idols,

and temples of Hindus are evident in the textbooks. While a token of representation of other religious symbols in the textbook of class 2 in unit 10 can be seen. Even that too is followed by a story about a Hindu devotee and god.

Names and characters in the stories and exercises in all textbooks are major representatives of Hindu religion. In the unit which describes family relationship such as parents, grandparents only the names from Hindu religion are mentioned. Hardly three different names can be found to be used in exercises from all three textbooks.

Cultural festival of Hindu religion that is Raksha Bandhan with a story from Mahabharat is also found.

This makes it very evident that the English textbooks of class 1, 2, and 3 of Karnataka government have given more preference to the representation of Hindu religion in terms of stories, pictures, names and characters and cultural festivals while not providing any space for the discussion or inclusion of other religions followed in the country. The textbooks are biased and are ridden with Hindu religious ideology representing its symbols, characters, scriptures, and culture.

The selected presentation of Hindu ideology in textbooks, however, reveals a contradiction of textbook preparation with the curriculum policy framework which the material producers have claimed to be following and abiding by.

As mentioned in the each of the textbook in the preface that they are prepared guided by the broader principle of National Curriculum Framework (NCF)-2005. It also in particular reference to religion documents that 'India is a secular democratic state, which means that all faiths are respected, but at the same time the Indian state has no preference for any particular faith.' This provides us with guidelines of the content regarding representation of religion which needs to neutral not favoring any religion or biased representation of any religious ideology. If at all any representation of faiths is provided the NCF-2005 guidelines mandate to provide equal mention to each faith no less no more. No partial or any biased representation of any religion can be in any way recommended or endorsed. The textbooks that are analyzed as part of the study clearly violate the basic guidelines provided in the NCF-2005 which it said to follow while also in the larger context violates the guiding principles of governance enshrined in the constitution of India.

As a result of the biased representation of the religion in textbooks, the textbooks officially promote and endorse promoting the Hindu religious ideology. even pictures in the textbooks. This hence makes the textbook a hateful resource. Moreover, the textbook does not even try to strike a balance in the representation of cultures to develop a cross-cultural understanding

of developing social harmony generating mutual respect. However, the Hindu ideology as a theory governing socioeconomic and political system needs a critical analysis which extends the scope of this study for further elaborations.

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