

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Four Advanced ELT Textbooks Based on Fairclough's Framework

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Abstract

Critical Discourse Analysis uncovers the relationship between discourse, ideology, and power. This study investigated and analyzed *contents*, *social relations*, and *subject positions* in conversations of four popular advanced ELT textbooks. The findings indicated that for contents, *giving/asking for information* and *interaction* were outstandingly significant. Regarding social relations, *friend* was the most conspicuous item. For subject positions, *societal*, *friendship*, and *occupational* took the first to third positions, respectively. The language utilized in ELT textbooks was not value free and discourse, tone, and intonation were based on the western ideology. Neo-liberalism, neoclassical ideology selected by the producers had effect on learners' attitudes towards social problems.

Keywords: Content, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, Social Relation, Subject Position.

1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a basic discipline in education provides answers to questions about the relationships between language, society, power, identity, ideology, politics, and culture. Van Dijk (1997) being a leading figure of this field, has defined CDA as a new multidisciplinary discipline for the analysis of text and talk in the humanities and social sciences. It examines the dominant culture in a society to realize the elements that have shaped that culture, made it dominant, and to analyze those elements. CDA studies specific areas of injustice, inequality, racism, danger, suffering, prejudice, and aims at providing a thorough description, explanation and critique of the textual strategies writers use to naturalize discourses.

This discipline has attracted many scholars since Fairclough's (1997) work. His model has provided guidelines for the CDA research in different territories including textbook evaluation. ELT textbooks are considered to be the main medium of instruction through which the students have access to English teaching materials. Therefore, it is significant to analyze ELT textbooks critically because through them ideologies, can be shaped, legitimized and naturalized for the language learners. As stated by Rashidi, Meihami, and Gritter (2016), "due to the prominent roles of ELT

textbooks in language education, they have been subject to investigation for their content, especially at discourse level” (p. 24).

ELT textbooks have been scrutinized through the CDA approach in many contexts, all around the world by various researchers (to name a few, Akincioglu, 2012; Gray, 2012; Hamdan, 2008; Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2009). These studies have focused on different topics such as gender, power, social relations, content, or subject positions and for different purposes. They have reported differences in ELT textbooks relevant to culture, context, and content.

Critical analysis of textbooks have also been studied by some Iranian researchers for different purposes. For example, Roohani and Tanbakooei (2012) investigated 3 aspects of meaning, namely social relations, subject positions, and contents in the conversation, vocabulary, and grammar of some ELT textbooks to find out whether there was any differences between the textbooks. The results revealed that social relations were mostly equal, and conversations often took place between a male and a female with equal social status and power. For subject positions and contents also some differences were observed. In another study, Baleghizadeh and Motahed (2010) examined the ideological content of conversations in six ELT British and American textbooks. The results showed that in terms of content, British textbooks entertained the students while American textbooks included more occupational and business-related issues. Moreover, some differences were observed regarding relations and social positions. Pourhassan Moghaddam (2015) conducted a study on formal features and concluded that in international ELT textbooks, there has always been a neoliberalism and free market attitude towards writing. Due to the importance of ELT textbooks in the Iranian curriculum, this paper examined four advanced ELT textbooks and posed the following questions:

1. What contents are mainly involved in the textbooks conversations?
2. What social relations are illuminated in the textbooks conversations?
3. What are the subject positions in the selected textbooks conversations?

2. Method

2.1 Materials

This research categorized and analyzed the conversations in four advanced ELT textbooks including, *TOP Notch*, *Summit*, *Passages*, and *New Interchange* via Fairclough’s (2001) CDA perspective. The ELT textbooks were selected because of the following reasons: (a) International popular publications like Cambridge and Longman have published them, (b) some well-known applied linguists have written them and they are regularly used by most of the English language institutes in Iran, (c) these instructional textbooks are written for advanced level learners which contain a complex use of language in context, and finally, (d)

these textbooks cover all the four language skills and have student's book, workbook, teacher's guide, audio program, dictionary CD-ROM, and test booklets.

2.2. Instruments

The conversations of the selected textbooks were scrutinized in terms of contents, social relations, and subject positions based on Fairclough's (2001) framework in order to find out the properties of those dimensions of meaning that emphasize or deemphasize a particular ideological stance in the textbooks. To be more precise, the number of occurrences of each constraint, that is, content, social relations, and subject positions throughout the textbooks were counted. Frequency and percentage of each category were identified and tabulated. The rationale was to discover the ideological orientation chosen by the textbook producers through the patterns of those dimensions of meaning which have been emphasized or deemphasized.

As shown in Table1, content refers to the text producer's knowledge and beliefs or as Fairclough explains it, one's experiences of the social or natural world like entertainment, education, or interaction content values. Relation refers to the social relationships enacted via the text like classmates, colleagues or friends. Subject position refers to the social identity of interactants like businessmen, employees, or employers. To sum up, content is what is said or done in a dialogue, relation refers to the social relations people assume in the discourse, and subject position, refers to the positions that people occupy in discourse. The following table adapted from Fairclough (2010) shows how linguistic features are related to dimensions of meaning and structural effect.

Table 2.1 *Experiential, Relational, Expressive Values (Fairclough, 2001)*

Dimensions of Meaning	Values of Features	Structural Effects
Contents	Experiential	Knowledge /beliefs
Social relations	Relational	Social relations
Subject positions	Expressive	Social identities

2.2. Procedures

The recent research was a descriptive non-experimental study. The conversations in all the four textbooks were collected and analyzed in terms of contents, social relations, and subject positions based on the framework. The frequency and percentage of each category were counted, listed, and analyzed to get a clear picture of the pattern of the occurrence of the three dimensions of meaning. Then, chi-square tests were run to explore the significant differences between the observed frequencies of the selected categories borrowed from the Fairclough's (2001) model.

3. Results

After collecting the data, the number of occurrence of each feature was examined by two raters; the raters worked together to come to a consensus about

what category they would give to the items. After negotiating, if there were discrepancies, they were resolved and thus inter-rater reliability equaled unity ($r=1.00$).

Table 3.1 *Frequency and Percentage of Contents*

Category	Top Notch		Summit		Passages		Interchange	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1. Giving and asking for information	9	25	6	27.27	11	50	6	37.5
2. Interaction	12	33.33	11	50	8	36.36	5	31.25
3. Social problem	0	0	3	13.63	1	4.54	2	12.5
4. Culture and customs	11	30.55	0	0	0	0	1	6.25
5. Entertainment	4	11.11	2	9.9	2	9.9	1	6.25
6. Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6.25
Total	36	100	22	100	22	100	16	100

As Table 3.1 shows, in Top Notch, *interaction* content value takes the first position, followed by *culture and customs*, *giving and asking for information*, *entertainment*, but *social problem* and *education* were not observed. Similarly, in Summit, the first rank was taken by *interaction*, followed by *giving and asking for information*, *social problem* and *entertainment* but the other two categories were absent. In passages, the most frequently content was *giving and asking for information*, followed by *interaction*, *entertainment* and *social problem* while, in Interchange, all the categories were present. The chi-square revealed that there were significant differences among the categories and the p value was less than the alpha level ($0.012 < 0.05$).

Table 3.2 *Frequency and Percentage of Social Relations*

Social Relations	Top Notch		Summit		Passages		Interchange	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1. Friends	24	80	14	70	9	47.36	10	71.42
2. Colleagues	2	6.66	4	20	1	5.26	3	21.42
3. Interviewer-interviewee	1	3.33	1	5	5	26.31	0	0
4. Wife-husband	3	9.99	1	5	2	10.52	1	7.14
5. Teacher-student	0	0	0	0	2	10.52	0	0
Total	30	100	20	100	19	100	14	100

As Table 3.2 shows, *friends* was outstandingly significant in all the books. In Top Notch the most and least frequently used relations were *friends* and *interviewer-interviewee*, respectively, but *teacher-student* category was not present at all. In Summit, the least frequently used categories were *interviewer-interviewee* and *wife-husband*. There was no *Teacher-student* category. In Passages, every

category was present. *Wife-husband* and *teacher-student* were the least frequently observed categories. In Interchange, after *friends*, *colleagues* was very frequent and *wife-husband* was the least frequently used one, with no trace of *interviewer-interviewee* and *teacher-student*. The chi-square test showed that there were significant differences because p value was less than alpha level ($0.03 < 0.05$). The frequency and percentage of subject positions are shown in Table 4.

Table 3.3 *Frequency and Percentage of Subject Positions*

Social relations	Top Notch		Summit		Passages		Interchange	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1. Friendship	6	28.57	9	45	7	31.81	5	31.25
2. Societal	7	33.33	6	30	10	45.45	8	50
3. Occupational	8	38.09	5	25	5	22.72	3	18.75
Total	21	100	20	100	22	100	16	100

Table 3.3 shows that in Top Notch, *occupational* and *friendship* were the most and least frequently observed categories. In Summit, the most frequent subject position belonged to *friendship* while the least one was *occupational*. In Passages and Interchange, *societal* and *occupational* were most and least frequently observed categories, respectively. The chi-square test showed that there were no significant differences because p was greater than the significance level ($.701 > .05$).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicated that in the conversations of all the selected ELT textbooks, only giving or asking for information and interaction were mostly focused. Very little emphasis was given to cover education, social problem, culture, customs, and entertainment, while the international textbooks are expected to raise learners' awareness of culture and custom varieties around the world. It is also expected that such textbooks cover social problems and different varieties of individuals' reactions to the problems. Contrary to the common expectations to observe focus on such topics in ELT textbooks through which the learners and teachers are supposed to learn about education, little attention were given to such issue. Undoubtedly, entertainment topics can be fruitful topics in rendering the culture and elaborating the conversations in the texts and also make it possible for learners to know much more about different hobbies and entertainments around the world, while the books were not focusing on such topics.

In case of social relations investigated in the conversations of the ELT textbooks, it was observed that friends in all the textbooks was the most conspicuous social relation emphasizing the equal social relations. This way, the conversations can be more comprehensible and friendly for the students. Teacher to student social relation was overlooked in all the conversations of the textbooks; whereas, this relation could be a good model of teaching and learning in real world life. Most importantly, no exercise of power was seen in cases such as interviewer-interviewee

or teacher-student interactions which was different from what we may observe in real life. This kind of image presented in textbooks seems unnatural. Presenting this picture about the world in the textbooks could be unreal and artificial.

For subject positions, the conversation of the textbooks were in favor of societal subject position. In other words, most of the conversations were taking place among the interlocutors in social contexts. Fairclough (1989) asserts that in modern society, the emphasis is on social skill training between pairs such as consumer service provider which are to function agreeably in the workplace. By analyzing the tone and intonation of the conversations, it was discovered that the language of the textbooks was reflecting western culture and ideology. The presence of western customs, cultural, social, historical, geographical, economic, political, religious, and literary topics in the books indicated the dominance of English. Regarding neoliberalism ideology, Apple (1999) emphasizes that the world is extremely competitive economically and learners are the future employees who should receive the necessary skills to compete professionally and efficiently. In this view, the world is very much like a vast supermarket and education is simply seen as a product like cars or TVs. The findings of this study are in line with the findings of the existing literature. They are in agreement with the findings of the studies such as Hamdan (2008), Roohani and Tanbakoei (2012), and Pourhassan Moghaddam (2015) which have categorized textbooks based on content, social relations and subject positions.

5. Conclusion

It seems that all the dimensions of meaning reflect the ideas advertised by neo-liberalism ideology and thought. The spread of English with its complete content of values is noticeable. Western culture, custom, and ideology are reflected through the conversations and texts in different textbooks. Although the conversations were mostly concerned with trivial and common issues with a very little attention to power and social inequality, simultaneously the capitalist lifestyle, specially, American lifestyle was advertised implicitly.

This study could have implications both at micro and macro levels. The textbook users, including practitioners of the field, teachers and students should be wary of being trapped in hidden ideologies behind textbooks and their implicit roles in altering the human mind. Therefore, linguistic and cultural influence of these textbooks should be taken into account. Accepting a CDA approach to language teaching and learning could be much more interesting for language learners to read between the lines and not in the lines in order to search for cultural, societal, and political differences dominated throughout the textbooks. Accordingly, the findings and interpretation of this study and similar studies can raise teachers and learners' consciousness and awareness to avoid considering ELT textbooks as value free. To sum up, the findings of this study showed that ELT textbooks are ideologically

biased and CDA tries to discover the hidden aspect of meanings involved in developing ELT textbooks.

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