



Book Review

Ideology and Hegemony of English Foreign Language Textbooks. Globally and Locally Written Practices by Ömer Gökhan Ulum and Dinçay Köksal. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019. 269 pp. €103,99 (hardcover), ISBN: 9783030358082.

Summary

The collaborative work of two scholars, Ömer Gökhan Ulum from Mersin University and Dinçay Köksal from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, brings a stimulating and refreshing addition to the field of Applied Linguistics of a critical analysis of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. The book is a dissertation project turned into a monograph by the authors. Accordingly, it follows the structure of a dissertation, divided into seven chapters including Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Data Analysis, Findings and Interpretations, Discussion and Conclusions, and Implications. I would highly recommend the book to anyone interested in the growing field of textbook evaluation as well as to all EFL pre- and in-service teachers, university students, Ministries of Education and publishing houses who must know the impact of ideological and hegemonic practices exercised in and through textbooks.

Chapter 1, Introduction, summarizes the information by stating the major aim and significance of the study. By emphasizing the practical role of textbooks in EFL contexts, the authors raise the issue of "hidden agendas" in textbooks that impose certain ideologies and hegemonic beliefs on language learners. The authors identify the absence of involvement of students and teachers in their analysis of ideologies and hegemonies practiced in EFL textbooks. Accordingly, the study attempts to unravel not only the ideologies and hegemonies implicit in the textbooks, but also neglected and undermined ideologies uncovered in the content by interviewing the teachers and the students who use those textbooks. The study aims to investigate the ideologies, value orientations, and hegemonic practices prevailing in globally and locally produced EFL textbooks. The thrust of the study also stems from the research gap the researchers found while reviewing the related literature. The adopted theoretical framework is critical theory, drawn from poststructuralism. The rationale behind their choice, as they state, is "post-structuralism underlines the heterogeneity of the text as well as its political and ideological aspects" (p. 7). Therefore, in the following Literature Review chapter, they review the concepts, elucidating the notions of ideology and hegemony from many perspectives, including politics.

The second chapter of the book, Literature Review, defines the key concepts that influence and form textbook content and stance. The reviewed concepts are also related to the two major notions of ideology and hegemony. The authors' review includes various topics ranging from globalization, the role of English in the globalization process, and the diversity of Englishes or the development of World Englishes, to the concept of ideology, including some political, linguistic, economic, and cultural ideologies. All these defined and reviewed concepts are tied to the textbook evaluation process, which is also explained in this chapter. As they assert, "Textbooks [are] representations of political, cultural, economic negotiations and conflicts. In that sense, textbooks cannot be innocent and pure" (pp. 42-43).

The third and fourth chapters describe the Methodology and Data Analysis processes respectively. The chapters comprise the description of research design, employed methods, settings, instruments, and involved participants. The mixed-methods approach was chosen for this study, in which both qualitative (semistructured interviews and textbook or documentary analysis) and quantitative (questionnaire using Likert scale) data were involved. The study focuses on both descriptive and interpretive phenomenology to examine the ingrained ideology and hegemony of EFL textbooks. In total, 18 EFL textbooks (6 globally written and 12 locally written in Turkey and Iran), 1,176 participants (1,014 students and 162 teachers) were involved. The participants were students and teachers affiliated with two preparatory schools of two universities and five high schools located in the city of Adana, Turkey. All instruments used for the analysis, including questionnaires for textbook analysis and the semistructured interview, were piloted and examined using statistical tools for reliability and validity purposes.

The fifth chapter includes information on the findings of the data analysis. The results pertaining to ideological elements, and hegemonic elements identified from the students' and teachers' interview transcripts are described thoroughly. The interview analysis and salient coded data are presented respectively. The findings also include documentary analysis of locally and globally written EFL textbooks, in which Ulum and Köksal analyzed the textbooks for the presence of compounds of culture, economy, religion, history, education, language, sports, politics, law, gender, partialism, multiculturalism, and affirmative action.

The sixth chapter, Discussion, is devoted to discussion of the findings concerning the research questions imposed at the beginning of the study. The researchers systematically investigated the compounds of ideology and hegemony in both globally and locally written textbooks used in Turkey and compared and contrasted their findings with other similar scholarly works. It is worth noting that the book is very comprehensive in determining the elements of ideology and hegemony embedded overtly and covertly in the textbooks. The major finding of the study is that the inner-circle countries' cultural ideologies and hegemonies in globally written textbooks was prevalent, while expanding-circle countries were mainly present in locally written textbooks, along with the hegemony and ideology of host/local countries (Turkey and Iran). While discussing the research questions about participants' perceptions of underlying ideological and hegemonic practices existing in the EFL textbooks, the chief finding showed a discrepancy in views of student and teacher populations. The high school and university students' perceptions and teachers' perceptions did not match on many aspects of ideology and hegemony of the textbooks, thus demonstrating varied pedagogical values and educational demands and needs.

The last chapter, Conclusions, reiterates the focus, objectives, research questions, and evaluations of major findings by giving detailed implications and recommendations to EFL in-service teachers in high school and university contexts, EFL learners, language policymakers, and the textbook authors/publishers.

Evaluation

This book exhibits many strong points. To begin with, the organization of the book is excellent; all sections are very distinctly signposted and subdivided, clearly organized, and very readable. The literature review encompassing definitions of key terms associated with a variety of ideological and hegemonic compounds is well-defined and very concise. The review section effectively brings different economic, political, theoretical, and pedagogical concepts together to clarify the subject matter and its significance for the status quo. Apparently, the authors intend to make the book accessible to all kinds of populations, so they take careful consideration of the reading populations' schematic knowledge, which is another laudable aspect of the book. Yet they hold a subtle epistemic stance until the end of the section, missing many opportunities to indicate the research gap or their particular niche in the field of textbook evaluation while examining and defining ideological and hegemonic components in general. Also, while introducing the notion of World Englishes (WE) and the countries described in Kachru's three circles, the authors remain elusive in terms of describing their stance in regard to WE ideology in textbooks. Additionally, at the end of the chapter, they provide a definition of two approaches, a process-based and an application-based approach of ideological meaning analysis, yet it is unclear how these approaches are related to their study and how they could be implemented in general. It is confusing for the reader to finish up the chapter with these definitions but leave them without discussion and without indicating the relationship to the study.

The methodology section is also well organized and coherently expressed for the reader to clearly picture the study with the possibility of replicating it, if so desired. However, it was not clear who the principal investigator (PI) or the person who conducted the interviews and collected and analyzed the data is. By looking at the cover of the book, many assume that it is a collaborative work of two scholars, yet it is not reflected in the methodology when they describe the PI and they refer to the person as "He" or the "Researcher": for example, "the researcher had worked as an English teacher at state schools for several years" (p. 49). This ambiguity distances the reader from the writer(s) and does not allow the writer to interact with the reader. In this chapter, the authors also explain the process of documentary analysis, i.e., the textbook evaluation process, in which they analyzed ideological and hegemonic elements through the checklist suggested by them. The checklist is neither included in appendices nor described in the Methodology section and the contents of the checklist remain problematic for the reader. It is also unclear if the analysis included only a language/textual component, or if a multimodal semiotic approach was applied to the analysis. The uncertainty deepens when Ulum and Köksal discuss both images and textual representation of ideologies and hegemonies in the textbooks when they mention the findings in the subsequent chapters. Hence, how the checklist functions in this case is problematic for not only understanding the process of documentary analysis, but also to implement it for replication purposes.

The chapter I found particularly enlightening was the Discussion section in which they review their findings and juxtapose with other similar works conducted in the area. Thus, they were able to accomplish the goal they pursued, which is to determine "what is contained in the textbook as ideology, (and) what is not contained as well" (p. 3). Accordingly, they found the topics which were excluded or ignored in the textbooks, such as "racism, critical thinking, sex education, gender-related issues including LGBTQ+ population, feminism, poverty and some political issues." Indeed, elucidating the exclusion of these topics from the textbooks is an exceptional discovery for the study. However, their importance with regard to the general scope of the study remains unclear, at least to this reader, as connections to ideology and hegemony were not made smoothly, but merely mentioned as topics which were not included in the content of the textbooks.

Last but not least, the last section comprising conclusive remarks and implications for a variety of populations engaged in education is done very thoroughly, enumerating recommendations to avoid “ideological and hegemonic” biases. The implications, in particular, exclusively highlight and exemplify the role that English and EFL textbooks can play not only in the educational life of language instructors and learners, but also for their identity construction and future endeavors. Yet the researchers failed to mention the limitations of their work, as well as recommendations for future work.

To sum up, despite some shortcomings, I would like to reiterate the excellence of the book. It is very comprehensive and well developed, and I highly recommend it to read, reflect upon, and apply to language teaching and learning.