

## **Ideologies in the Imported English Textbooks: EFL learners and Teachers' Awareness and Attitude\***

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the ideological prompts present in the imported instructional English textbooks in Iran and the learners' attitudes towards English. Further, the instructors' awareness of these ideologies was examined through a questionnaire. To find the ideological values, a content analysis of conversations, texts, and pictorial prompts in Spectrum and True to Life English textbook series was conducted and the extant ideologies were categorized and statistically analyzed. The results showed that imported textbooks tend to represent particular ideologies and cultural values. The most prevalent ideologies were hegemony of English, sexism, and cultural stereotypes. To discover the learners' attitudes towards English, a 35-item questionnaire was developed, piloted and distributed by the researchers. The results showed that institute learners and high-school students have different attitudes towards English. Finally, language teachers' awareness of ideologies in the textbooks was also examined. It was found that institute teachers are aware of the ideologies but they were not very much concerned with teaching or raising awareness about them.

**Keywords:** Attitude, ideology, imported textbooks, awareness.

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## Introduction

Language and culture are interrelated. A language is an expression of a culture and any language course involves learning about the cultures of the peoples who speak the language (Starkey, 1999). Languages are historical constructs with a political process at their center (Joseph, 2006). Fairclough (1989) argues that “language connects with the social entity through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles of power” (pp. 14-15). Starkey (1999) argues that teaching culture has political dimensions. He argues that foreign language courses are significant vehicles for political education. By implication, we may argue that language learning is a political and ideological process. In fact, according to Spitulnik (1998, p. 193) “language is a marker of ideology”.

Ideology is a concept which has been the concern of many scholars. The term “ideology” was first coined by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a science of ideas and their basis in sensation. Hasan (1986, p. 26 cited in Baik, 1994) defines ideology as “a socially constructed system of ideas which appears as if inevitable”. One of the earliest definitions of ideology by Huaco (1971, p. 2) states that “ideologies are organized systems of beliefs with ready formulas for the manipulation of the masses.”

Ideologies in a language are important for social and linguistic analysis in the sense that they are not only about language. Irvine (1998, p. 56) defines language ideologies as “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests”.

Among languages, English is the most frequently taught second language throughout the world. Meanwhile, as Seargeant (2008, p. 3) argues “The subject of English in the world is one that is predominantly ideology-led”. Learning English has been spreading in Iran. Many private language institutes have been established in the country. Moreover, English is one of the main courses in curriculum of the secondary schools. One of the discrepancies between language institutes and schools is in the textbooks they provide for the learners. While private institutes use textbooks produced in the countries other than Iran (e.g. texts

produced in the United States or Britain), governmental schools provide learners with the local textbooks prepared by the Ministry of Education.

Textbooks are parts of a system enforcing a sense of responsibility, morality, and cultural coherence. As such, textbooks used in EFL classrooms provide the primary source of information on culture and language for those studying a language. Textbook is defined by Stray (1994) as "a book designed to provide authoritative pedagogic version of an area of knowledge" (p. 2). Researchers like Venezky (1992 cited in Lebrun et al., 2002, p. 437), views the textbook as "a cultural artifact and as a surrogate curriculum". Textbook publication is associated with economic, social, and political overtures. "Neither a book nor its knowledge is neutral or interest-free" (Christian-Smith, 1991, p. 50). In fact, textbooks are ideologies embedded in curriculum (Van Dijk, 1993).

Consumerism can be presented through introducing entertainment, fashion, shopping, and technology. Hegemony, according to Van Dijk (1991), refers to the manner in which the people of the ruling class establish and sustain their dominance over the masses. The hegemony of English, or the domination of English as a world language, may not have come to exist of its own accord; there may have been conscious efforts on the part of the speakers of English as a native language (especially by the British Council in England) to teach the language in order to transmit their ideologies and beliefs to speakers of other languages (Phillipson 1992). Social power is a property of the relationship between groups, classes, or other social formations, or between persons as social members. Foucault (1979, cited in Fairclough, 1998) categorizes social power into sexism and racism. Sexism refers to the dominance or superiority of one gender over another. Racism refers to the superiority of one nation over the others. An organization, form of consciousness or mentality is racist if it asserts that racial identities are mutually exclusive; that the members of one's own race are righteous and rational, the members of the other race are evil and irrational (Wolfenstein, 1977). Finally, cultural stereotypes can be defined as "the conventionalized ways of talking and thinking about other people and cultures" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 131).

The way language textbooks as carriers of ideologies are approached by foreign language learners and their attitudes towards such

ideologically-driven entities is yet another significant issue. Azjen (1988) defines attitude as “a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution, or event” (cited in Baker, 1992, p. 11). A language attitude is usually conceived of as a “specific response to certain aspects of a particular language” (King, 2000, p. 2)

‘Linguistic attitude’ is understood as “being an individual or collective expression towards language and any issues related to language; it is the act of responding to certain aspects of language, linguistic ideologies and linguistic use” (Choi, 2003, p. 5). As Lewis (1981, cited in Baker, 1992) argues any language policy and planning must take care of the attitudes of the target group for whom a textbook is designed. Accordingly, as a second objective of this research we try to discover the possible differences between the attitudes of learners who are taught English through the internationally produced textbooks and those who use the locally produced textbooks taught in high schools.

More importantly, knowing that language is ideology-laden and textbook publication is not interest-free, it would be useful to discover if material developers have any regard to ideology in developing the textbooks for English learners. Therefore, this research examines the possible ideological patterns in a selection of internationally produced textbooks. Another attempt is to investigate the extent to which the teachers who teach these textbooks are aware of the ideological patterns in these textbooks. Awareness of these ideologies by language instructors and their attitudes towards them can have a significant impact on their instructional decisions and the teaching of culture in the classroom.

To achieve the purpose of the study, the following research questions were put forth:

1. What kinds of ideologies are promoted through the “Spectrum” and “True to Life” textbook series imported and used in Iran?
2. Is there any difference between the attitude of language learners in high schools with those of the learners in institutes towards English language and culture?
3. Are the private institute teachers aware of the ideologies within these textbooks?

### Participants

The participants of the study consisted of English language learners and teachers. Two groups of learners were selected to find out the difference between their attitudes towards English. One group was 60 high-school students who were instructed through government-sponsored local English textbooks. These learners were selected from four schools in Tehran and Kerman. They had not attended any private English language institute and they were assumed to be at the same level of language proficiency. The other learner group included 60 institute learners who were taught *Spectrum* and *True to Life* textbooks from six institutes in the cities of Tehran, Kerman, and Shiraz.

Also, a group of 30 teachers who were teaching *Spectrum* and *True to Life* textbooks in private language institutes was chosen to discover if they are aware of the ideological patterns in these textbooks. These teachers were teaching in different institutes in Tehran, Kerman, and Shiraz.

### Materials and method

We selected the most popular textbooks taught in Iranian language institutes. Our initial investigation showed that *Spectrum* and *True to Life* series are the most widely used textbooks recommended by these institutes. Therefore, we focused on *Spectrum I*, *Spectrum VI*, *True to Life Elementary*, and *True to Life Upper-Intermediate* series.

The reason for the selection of these levels was two-fold. Examination of all the two book series would have been beyond the scope of this study in the first place. Moreover, we were interested in comparing the presence of ideologies regarding the language levels of the textbooks. That is, we were trying to discover the extent to which the proportion of ideological presentation would vary from beginner to higher level textbook series.

Moreover, to examine the attitudes of high-school students and institute learners towards English, a 35-item questionnaire was developed, piloted, and administered to English language learners in both state-run schools and private English language schools. The importance of studying attitudes is manifested by Lewis (1981, cited in Baker, 1992) who argues

that “Any policy for language should take into account the attitudes of those who may be affected” (p. 262).

Furthermore, to investigate the language institute teachers’ awareness of the ideologies in the imported textbooks, a 20-item questionnaire was developed, piloted, and distributed among the language institute teachers.

Three types of analyses were conducted to find answers to the questions.

First, the selected textbooks were analyzed for the ideologies inserted in them and the frequency of ideologies for each textbook was tabulated. Content analysis and pictorial analysis were done to discover the ideologies. The content analysis dealt with examining the content of conversations, texts, articles, and readings and searching for ideologies inserted in them. Moreover the ideologies presented through pictures were also examined. To make sure that the categorization of ideologies is reliable, the textbooks were analyzed by a second rater. Then, the correlation was computed as a measure of inter-rater reliability which was significant for all four textbooks as displayed in table 1.

## Results

Table 1 shows the frequency of ideologies in individual textbooks.

Table 1. Frequency of ideologies in individual textbooks

Ideological Value	<i>Spectrum series</i>		<i>True to Life series</i>	
	<i>I</i>	<i>VI</i>	<i>Elementary</i>	<i>Upper-intermediate</i>
<b>Consumerism</b>	3	18	13	11
<i>Entertainment</i>	1	6	9	2
<i>Fashion</i>	1	3	1	3
<i>Shopping</i>	0	3	1	2
<i>Technology</i>	1	6	2	4
<b>Hegemony</b>	5	10	10	3
<i>Superiority of English</i>	3	5	5	2
<i>Superiority of US</i>	2	5	5	1
<b>Social power</b>	7	30	9	22
<i>Racism</i>	1	3	2	4
<i>Sexism</i>	5	11	3	7



<i>Cultural Stereotype</i>	1	8	3	6
<i>Non-Islamic Values</i>	0	8	1	5
<b>Total</b>	15	58	32	36
<b>Sum total</b>	73		68	
Inter-rater Reliability	.95	.97	.96	.80

The obtained data show that in *Spectrum I*, sexism, consumerism and hegemony are the most prevalent ideologies. In the *Spectrum VI*, ideologies such as consumerism and sexism are the most promoted ideologies followed by cultural stereotypes and non-Islamic values. . In the *True to Life* elementary, consumerism and hegemony and entertainment are the commonest ideologies . In the *True to Life* upper-intermediate, consumerism, sexism, and cultural stereotypes are the most frequent ideologies. From the total frequencies, it can be concluded that *Spectrum VI* (total frequency: 58) has the most ideologies. Comparing frequencies, one can observe that the higher the level of a textbook, the more frequent the ideologies. Further consumerism and sexism were found to be the most common ideological prompts across all these imported textbook series.

The second analysis dealt with the difference between high-school students' attitudes and those of institute learners towards English. To this end , a student questionnaire was designed for the English learners based on the analysis of ideological values. That is, the ideologies inherent in both textbooks were put into the questionnaire. This questionnaire had 40 questions. 35 of these questions were on a Likert scale, and five were open-ended questions about whether these learners watch satellite, foreign movies, how much they are familiar with foreign artists, singers, and have been abroad before.

The purpose of this questionnaire was to discover whether the ideologies of the textbooks had entered students' values system. Before the administration of the questionnaire, it was given to five specialists to get their comments on the readability and appropriacy of the items. All of these specialists were PhD holders in TEFL. One had worked on cultural values of the textbooks. Another one was working on critical pedagogy and teacher education. The other three were specialist in TEFL.

In the next stage, the student's questionnaire was given to 30 students similar to the intended participants of this research and were asked to underline anything they did not understand or considered vague. Consequently, confusing and malappropriate forms, structures, and items were removed or modified.

The modified questionnaire was given to 60 high-school students and 60 institute learners. Institute learners were chosen among those who were taught the *Spectrum* and *True to Life* textbooks for learning English. The two groups were selected to see whether those who had studied or not studied these imported books held different ideological and cultural values or not. The items included in the questionnaire attempted to test the participants' attitudes towards the ideological values such as hegemony of English language (i.e. England, and USA); consumerism through items related to fashion, entertainment, technology; and social power through sexism, racism, non-Islamic values, and cultural stereotypes.

The results of the student questionnaire show that high-school students and institute learners have different attitudes towards English (see Table 2).

Table 2. Overall descriptive statistics of the learners' attitudes towards English

Groups	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
high-school	60	111.11	13.358	1.724
Institute	60	132.10	10.175	1.313

To discover whether the difference between means is significant, an Independent Samples t-test was conducted.

Table 3. Total t-test of learners' attitudes towards English

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
Score	2.563	.112	-9.679	118	.000	-20.98333	2.16792	Lower	Upper
								-25.27641	-16.69026



The observed  $t$  value exceeds the critical value. It means that the difference between attitudes of high-school students and those of institute learners is significant.

Furthermore, the teachers' awareness of the ideologies in the textbooks was investigated. A 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire was distributed among 30 teachers who had taught Spectrum and True to Life textbooks. The purpose of the teacher questionnaire was to discover the institute teachers' awareness of ideologies present in the imported textbooks. This was designed to examine the attitude of institute teachers on the question of language, ideology and culture. The other purpose of this questionnaire was to investigate whether the teachers convey this awareness to their students or not.

After the development of the questionnaire, it was given to five specialists to read. The same procedures mentioned above for the development of the previous questionnaire was employed. The final version was administered to 10 teachers and they were asked to identify anything they considered incomprehensible or vague. Consequently, some problematic or confusing items were discarded and some were revised. After this pilot stage, the questionnaire was administered to 30 teachers from private language institutes who were teaching the Spectrum and True to Life textbooks. This questionnaire had two parts. The first part attempted to test the awareness of the teachers and the second part tried to discover if they conveyed their awareness of ideologies in the textbook to the learners. Teachers' awareness was tested through items related to ideological values such as hegemony of English, superiority of English-speaking countries, consumerism, and social power. The conveyance of this awareness was tested through items related to the techniques, methods, and creativities teachers applied in the classroom such as discussing the differences of source and target culture and comparing and contrasting these two.

The results of teacher questionnaire demonstrated that institute teachers are aware of the ideologies in the textbooks taught in institutes. Below, the total frequency of options is displayed.

Table 4. Total frequency of options of teacher questionnaire

Options	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
quite disagree	26	120.0	-94.0
Disagree	92	120.0	-28.0
no idea	145	120.0	25.0
Agree	196	120.0	76.0
quite agree	141	120.0	21.0
Total	600		

Table 4 shows that the options “agree” and “quite agree” opted by teachers were more frequently chosen than the other choices. Although there are also many neutral responses given by those who selected ‘no idea’ choice, it seems that the majority of institute teachers are aware of the ideologies in the textbooks. Moreover, to further examine the significance of the difference between frequencies of options, Chi-Square test was conducted. Table 5 shows the Chi-Square value for individual questions.

Table 5. Chi-Square analysis of teacher questionnaire for individual questions

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20
Chi-Sq.	5.6	16.4	7.8	3.6	6.6	10.6	17.2	3.2	3.6	.66	17.3	29.2	6.6	11.3	15.3	12.1	9	4	1.4	7
Df	2	3	3	3	4	4	3	2	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	4	4	3	4
Sig.	.06	.001	.04	.30	.15	.03	.001	.20	.30	.88	.002	.00	.15	.01	.002	.007	.06	.40	.69	.13

The Chi-Square value observed for the majority of the first 15 questions is more than the critical value; it means that most institute teachers are aware of most of the the ideologies in the imported English language textbooks.

However, the Chi-Square value for the last five questions needs more attention. The last five questions were developed to discover whether the teachers convey their awareness to the language learners. The results are discussed in detail below.

Question 16, *I discuss Iranian customs in the classroom*, from 30 teachers; most of the answers were positive. It means that they discuss the

native culture in the classroom. The observed Chi-Square value also support this statement; it is more than the critical value.

Question 17, *I try to make the students aware of the ideologies within English textbooks*. The observed Chi-Square is less than the critical one; it means that teachers do not discuss ideologies in the imported textbooks.

Question 18, *I discuss Islamic values with the students*. The observed Chi-Square is less than the critical one. Most of them do not discuss Islamic values in the classroom; only 10 teachers from 30 answered this question “always” or “often”.

Question 19, *I compare and contrast the two cultures in the classroom*. Chi-Square observed in this question is less than the critical value; only 14 answers were “always” or “often”.

Question 20, *I explain the negative and positive values of native and target (foreign) cultures in the classroom*. The observed Chi-Square is less than the critical one; only 11 teachers' answers suggest that they discuss it.

### **Discussion**

As mentioned before, textbook publication and teaching language is ideology-led. The first question of this study dealt with the kinds of ideologies existing within the “Spectrum” and “True to Life” textbooks taught in Iranian English language institutes. By looking at the frequency of ideologies in the textbooks, one can see that the hegemony of English, sexism, consumerism, and cultural stereotypes are strongly promoted in these imported text books. These results are in line with the findings of Porreca (1984), Bhatia (2000), Kubota (1998), and Apple (1991).

Consumerism is the most frequently promoted ideology in both Spectrum and True to Life series. Consumerism can be presented through introducing entertainment, fashion, shopping, and technology. For instance in the *Spectrum VI* (page 29), there is an advertisement about tours to different parts during vacations. Some pictures of Willemstad, San Juan, and Southampton are displayed to persuade the reader. In the *True to Life Upper intermediate* (pages 98 and 99), some styles of dressing have been shown. Also in *Spectrum VI* (page 24), there is a conversation between the salesperson and the customer, and it can be

observed how the salesperson tries to persuade the woman to buy the item.

Sexism is the second most frequent ideology. One of the aspects of sexism is the omission of females in textbooks. In the *Spectrum VI textbook* (page 11), talking about discrimination, the biography is about a sportsman, Jesse Owen. Also, in a reading on *balloonist and risks* (p. 32), the whole experience is about a male balloonist, Ben Abruzzo. In the *True to Life upper intermediate* (p. 34), when it is talking about famous people; *Bob Dole, Michael Jackson, and Ben Johnson*, again we can observe the omission of females. Another aspect of sexism is the roles specified for the sexes in the textbooks. Considering this factor in the analysis, it was found that well-paid and prestigious jobs are assigned to males, while some dull jobs are given to female characters. For example, in the *Spectrum VI* (page 82), Sam is the boss and Linda is his employee. In a discussion about *Blake Hudson and Sofia Estrada* (page 97), Blake is a specialist in infectious diseases, while Sofia is a student.

In the analysis of the *True to Life, Upper intermediate*, in a discussion about the negative side of jobs (page 100); the sexism can be observed in the pictures.

The division of jobs is: *Females*: nurse, hairdresser, and flower arranger; *Males*: traffic warden, warden, and lifeguard

Superiority of English is another most frequent ideology. Hegemony of English can be manifested through the superiority of English language and culture and superiority of English-speaking countries. Superiority of English is one of the most frequent values present both in the *Spectrum* and *True to Life* textbooks. For example, in the *Spectrum I* (page 66), there is an advertisement entitled: *You want to learn English fast*. It offers the International Student Travel; providing tours to London, Sydney, and Washington. In the *True to Life Elementary* (page 25), there is a topic: *I am studying English and really enjoying it*. All these demonstrate the significant advantage of learning about English and the heavy demand and desire for it.

Another aspect of hegemony is depicted through superiority of US, English people, English culture, English artists, and English customs. In the *Spectrum I* (page 5), there is a passage in which from among the four

people displayed in the picture, three are American; Cruise, Houston, and Jackson. In the *Spectrum VI*, superiority of the US is more prevalent. Writers, actors, musicians, sportsmen, performers, and dancers presented in the textbook are mostly American. Even, talking about the differences through the time, the photos of New York are displayed to compare its past and present (page 48).

The results are in line with Bhatia (2000) who notes that English language has affected the radio, television, and print media in India; it promotes consumerism, advertisement, and fashion. Cultural stereotypes were also significantly present in these English textbooks. As Kubota (1998) notes one of the ideological aspect of teaching and learning English is the construction of cultural stereotypes and trivialization of content. The negative side of American society including poverty, crime, illiteracy, racism, and so forth is rarely touched upon. Lummis (1976, cited in Kubota, 1998) pointed out that the images of the United States presented in English classes are what native teachers wish. The negative side of American society such as poverty, crime, illiteracy, and racism is rarely touched upon. This was found in the textbooks analyzed. In the *Spectrum VI*, mostly positive cultural values and customs are discussed. To the reader's eye, this society can be an ideal society. Some of the values and customs which are more prevalent in *Spectrum VI* include charity (page 16, a society for orphaned children); sports tourism (page 28); entertainment (page 32, talking about sports, balloonist), different music performances (pages 72, 76, and 78), dance theater (page 122); and talking about punctuality of Americans (page 129).

Analyzing the *True to Life, we came up with the* manifestation of these stereotypes too. In the *True to Life Upper Intermediate* (page 41), in a letter written to an advisor, the writer talks about the *hospitality* of the writer. On page 65, the writer talks about the time management. Some other examples are charity (page 109); leisure time (page 115); good manners (page 130); having respect for adults (page 130). Therefore, as Apple (1991) suggests textbooks reflect not only knowledge but also ideological values, cultures, and economic interests.

The second question of the study dealt with the possible difference between the attitudes of language learners in high schools with those of

the learners in private language institutes towards English language and culture. The results of attitude questionnaire showed that the students who learn English through local textbooks have different attitudes from the learners who learn English through the textbooks imported in Iran. We tried to investigate the learners' attitudes through variables such as their attitudes towards English language, non-Islamic values, English culture, English customs, fashion, position of English in the world and its importance. From the results, it can be concluded that both groups have similar attitudes towards some cultural values which are rooted in their own society such as relationships between different genders and Islamic values. However, there are significant differences regarding their attitudes towards English language and its importance, English society, English people, English morals, and their interest in English products such as movies. This difference may be due to the fact that they are exposed to different textbooks with different ideological values.

As for the third question of the study, the results of teacher questionnaire show that institute teachers are aware of the ideologies in the internationally produced textbooks. However, the data from the last five questions showed that teachers do not convey their awareness to the learners. It is expected that they should make the students aware that learning a language is not only its grammar but a system of communication to share ideas, values, and a way of controlling people and influencing their thinking (Taki, 2008).

The results of this study can offer valuable insights to textbook writers and curriculum designers in designing English teaching courses, writing textbooks, and developing language curricula. Given that most English textbooks are produced in countries other than Iran, the findings of the study can be applied by the textbook producers to consider the cultural differences among different countries.

Moreover, teachers need to be more cognizant of teaching cultural values, especially those that may cause culture shock and disaster?? for the learners. They should also increase their awareness about textbooks ideologies and try to convey this awareness to the learners. It is by drawing attention to the factors that lead to cultural conflict and culture shock that intercultural understanding can be promoted (Bambgose,



1994). Further, awareness of the influence of the culture of a dominant language is necessary because the long-term influence may lead to a loss of confidence in the values of the less dominant language and culture.



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