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ELT Coursebooks and the Elite: Examining Social Representations in ESL

ABSTRACT

ESL/EFL instructional materials have traditionally represented an ideal society and some texts can be offensive to certain learners. The mainstream ideologies reflected in the coursebooks exert a negative influence to the diverse lifestyles we have in our classrooms. If students do not reconcile their identities with the discourse in the materials, they are prone to reproduce negative stereotypes and therefore, perpetuate misconceived common sense beliefs. Unless teachers scrutinize coursebooks for possible "hidden agenda" or explicit bias, we become accomplices of the same forces that keep us in a subordinate position. This study examines 3 textbooks currently in use in Spain to identify and describe the social representations found and to investigate whether there is sexism and the ideologies that constrain these representations. This semantic analysis allows for empowerment of learners and enhances the promotion of language resources that will equip students with linguistic tools to contest inequalities.

KEY WORDS: coursebooks, stereotypes, ideologies, social representations, bias

1. Introduction

Social representations in coursebooks are important for reflecting the truth about our plural society by including multiple identities and diverse lifestyles of today's Europe. Additionally, the positive portrayal of student identities in coursebooks empowers them to take part in the interaction in class and outside of class and to express their identities if they wish to do so.

Coursebooks and instructional materials have traditionally represented a stereotyped society. It seems that ESL/EFL coursebooks and instructional materials depict a stereotypical picture of gender and social minorities. These stereotyped ideologies promote sexism and racism among the student community and in society as a whole. It then becomes a cultural problem as well as a language problem (L. Sheldon, 1988; J.M. Cots, 2006; J. Gray, 2000; M.Otlowski, 2003).

Due to the amount of time employed in the use of coursebooks, the author's ideologies have been essential components of English as a second or foreign language classroom activity. Therefore, the significance of the influence of ideologies on students' lives could help them improve their linguistic abilities and their self-image, but ideologies could also exert a negative effect on learners and the consequences could be prejudicial, which means that the ideologies in coursebooks are powerful tools that need to be examined.

This study examines how three EFL/ESL coursebooks currently in use in Spain represent social groups in order to analyze ideological stances, attitudes, presuppositions, topics and values so as to shed light not only on what explicitly appears, but also on omitted and implicit meanings.

2. Theoretical Framework

Language is an instrument that is used to categorize, to position oneself and others in a speech community, and to get things done. It is an inherent part of all people's identities. These many identities of a person are shaped by broader interests concealed in language, which are produced and reproduced on the basis of power relations and the values dictated by hegemonic ideologies.

2.1 Discourse Studies

One of the goals of discourse studies is for ESL/EFL teaching and learning to model a culture of critical thinking, which will serve as an important reference for future students to make inquiries about issues that concern their lives in general (R. Wodak 2003,N. Fairclough 2003, and Van Dijk 1984, 2009). The theoretical framework for this study is derived from an adaptation of N. Fairclough's (2003) 'model' and consequent with discourse studies, as presented in G. Weiss and R. Wodak (2003), R. Wodak and Meyer (2009) and T. A. Van Dijk (1984, 2003, 2009). This model illustrates that language ideology awareness is relevant in the process of teaching and learning because if students believe the implicit negative stereotypic portrayal of some social groups, they are deemed to reproduce and perpetuate these stereotypes. Therefore, an eclectic critical pedagogy could result as an outcome of this research. It is through language that power relations are enacted and used to discriminate, but it is also through language that social boundaries are deconstructed. Subsequently, the purpose of the present thesis is explained in what follows.

2.2 Purpose of the study

In the past few decades, minority groups in Europe have gained official recognition of their civil rights; for example, same-sex marriage has become legal and the rights of same-sex couples to adopt children recognized, the opportunities open to women have broadened, and more ethnic groups share the resources in their communities.

However, these developments are often not reflected in the coursebooks available in the European market. This is a critical point because, apart from being teaching materials, coursebooks influence students' life in the ways they reproduce the worldview of mainstream society and practice power relations that exclude and include

individuals. Although there is a clear intention to look cosmopolitan, texts do not always reflect the advances in society.

Therefore, the main purpose of this thesis is to identify and describe the social groups represented in three ESL/EFL coursebooks currently in use in Spain and in other parts of the world and to analyze the ideologies that constrain these representations from a qualitative-quantitative-sociolinguistic perspectives.

2.3 Objectives

Following the above-mentioned facts, the objectives of this analysis are as follows.

- Explore the "Us" and "Them" polarity in EFL/ESL coursebooks in use in Spain.

- Analyze the examples found in the texts with respect to how social groups are represented, misrepresented or omitted.

- Examine a potential hidden agenda in EFL/ESL coursebooks.

3. Method

A semantic analysis guides this study, which began in 2003. A. Cunningsworth's checklist for topic and subject content will be adapted as guidance for the analysis. According to A.Cunningsworth (1984,1995), a "hidden curriculum" in a textbook is influential to the process of second language acquisition.

Besides the content of the coursebooks, the images will also be analyzed in terms of stereotypic views of "Us" and "Them", following G.Kress and T. Van Leeuwen's model of analysis and counting the frequency of appearance of social groups and the way they are positioned in each picture in relation to the reader. Images do not go unnoticed in classrooms because they are very powerful and exert an important influence on learners' lives.

3.1 Corpus

Table 1 Corpus

<u>Features of the coursebooks selected for this analysis</u>

AUTHOR/S	YEAR	TITLE	LEVEL	PAGES	UNITS	CITY/ COUNTRY	PUBLISHER
BOOK I							
Gillie Cunningham &							Cambridge University
Jan Bell	2009	Face2face	Advanced	160	10	Italy	Press
BOOK II							Oxford University
Liz and John Soars	2009	New Headway	Intermediate	160	12	Oxford	Press
BOOK III							
Helena Gomm and Jon							
Hird	2004	Inside Out	Intermediate	160	16	Spain	Macmillan/Heinemann

The corpus is constituted by eight ESL/EFL coursebooks from different publishers and authors for reasons of impartiality. One reason behind the choice of these coursebooks is that they are very popular around the world. These books have appeared as an answer to "old-fashioned" methodologies in Second Language Acquisition and in line with "modern" teaching methodologies used in our schools today. The books are written for adults and young adults. They "have been designed to develop real-life communicative skills and powers of self-expression" (Inside Out back cover). Another reason for the choice of these books lies in the questions behind this study or which social groups are included or represented in EFL/ESL coursebooks and whether ESL/EFL coursebooks are in line with the advances of European society.

As a result, I probably chose the most prestigious and some of the coursebooks that

are most currently used in the market to help answer some of the questions about how material writers, editors and publishers represent social groups in ESL/EFL instructional materials.

3.2 The students using the coursebooks

The students are undergraduate and graduate students from all of the various college degree programs at a university in Spain who take English courses as part of their curriculum or for personal motivation and professional reasons, as well as professors, administrative staff members and the general public who register for English courses. Although mostly from Catalonia and the rest of Spain, students also come from other countries, especially from other European countries and Latin America. According to the official statistics, 97% of the enrolled students are Spanish and 3% are foreigners. However, many people who count as Spanish have double nationality and use the Spanish documents for practical reasons.

The proficiency level of the students using the coursebooks is B1, B2 and C1, according to the Common European Framework for languages or "independent and proficient language users", although years of contact with English may differ significantly. The average age of the students is 23 and most of them are young females. As stated above, these coursebooks are sold around the world from Chile to Malaysia. Hence, the range of users of these coursebooks is enormous.

3.4 Research questions

In line with the purpose of this study, I seek to answer the following questions:

- Which are the social groups represented in the images and written texts of the coursebooks?

- How are the social groups described?

- Are there any differences among the different book companies in terms of social representations?

- Are there any differences between the selected coursebooks and other studies in other parts of the world?

3.5 Data collection

Table 3

Distribution of frequencies relating to social-group representation in EFL/ESL coursebooks

Representations	Book I Face2face	Book II New Headway	Book III Inside Out
Age	Adults and young adults	Adults and young adults	Adults and young adults
Gender	64 females-88 males	60 females- 130 males	55 females- 66 males
Professions	high tech, media, sports, science, music, office, science	science, homemaking, sports, arts, literature, high tech, office	sports, arts, music, media, entertainment, literature
Ethnicity	3 Asians, 4 Blacks, 145 Whites	6 Asians, 17 Blacks, 167 Whites	3 Asians, 5 Blacks, 113 Whites
Sexual	heterosexuality	heterosexuality	heterosexuality

orientation			
Religion	invisibility	Mother Theresa working with the poor	invisibility
Social status	Upper-middle	Upper-middle	Upper-middle
Disability	invisibility	invisibility	invisibility
Language	UK English	UK English	UK English

5. Analysis

5.1 Women's representation in Inside Out MACMILLAN/HEINEMANN

This book, in general, paints a negative picture of women. They are represented in traditional roles as homemakers, eager to get married, in low-category jobs, cooking, washing and taking care of children, blamed for the high rate of divorce, and as hysterical about getting old. Males, on the contrary, are depicted as reliable, successful, rich, trustworthy, and good-looking.

It is assumed that everyone belongs to an affluent society where, for instance, if one gets tired of work, it is possible to be able to afford taking a sabbatical to travel around the world. Inequality expressed in language structures such as "women aren't allowed" (p.89) as well as discrimination and sexism expressed through style such as "she's usually late" (p.84) plagues Macmillan/Heinemann in terms of gender difference. Even in the chapter about stereotypes where the authors pretend to assume that there are no differences and that women must have equal rights (p.113), there is implicit and explicit negative stereotypes about women in general while being positive about men.

Social roles that have traditionally belonged to the male world are still explicitly conveyed in Macmillan/Heinemann. Therefore, women are kept under-represented,

invisible and denigrated. In what follows, examples of the above-mentioned stereotypes will be shown.

Example 1

I was under the impression that I was quite a relaxed sort of person until I watched the video of my sister's wedding. As I watched myself, I realised that I am not the cool, calm, sophisticated woman I thought I was. In fact I'm the opposite. I fidget. I talk non-stop, fiddle with my hair scratch my nose, wave my hands around like a lunatic, bite my nails and I never sit back and relax on a seat, I sit on the edge of it, ready to jump up and go somewhere else. So it was no surprise when a friend gave me The Little Book of Calm for my last birthday. I read the blurb on the back cover. Feeling stressed?' it asked.' Need some help to regain balance in your life?

The Little Book of Calm is full of advice to follow and thoughts to inspire. Open it at any page and you will find a path to inner peace. So I opened it at any page and read the advice: Wear white. 'Wear white! I haven't worn white since my first child was born. This is not good advice for someone who has to deal with young children and their dirty fingers every day. I turned to another page. , Take a lesson in calmness from children. Watch how children live every moment for the pleasure of the moment. Do you know my children? When one of them is screaming, Aargh ! He's pulling my hair!' and the other is screaming, She's taken my sweets!', the feeling I get is not calmness. 'Make an appointment with yourself to deal with worries at a specific time in the future. Make an appointment! I've already got too many appointments. I don't need another appointment to worry about. 'Get up early and watch the sunrise. Well that's nothing new. I wake up at the crack of dawn every day, thanks to the children. I haven't had a lie-in for years. 'For every ninety minutes of work, take a twenty- minute break.' Yes, I

like that. But there's a problem. Who's going to tell my children, "Don't disturb

Mummy

now, she's having a break."? 'Use a soft voice.' With fighting children? I don't think

so- In fact, my voice is getting louder every day. I decided to try once more.

"Rediscover milk". No problem. I love milk and I drink it all the time ... with a shot of

strong Italian espresso coffee in it, of course. (Inside Out, pp. 17)

Example 1. In chapter, 2 entitled: "Relax" women are depicted as always on the verge of a nerve breakdown (pp.14-17). Even though on page 15 we can see two men who look anxious and a woman who seems happy, the pictures on pages 14 and 17, where women openly express their negative emotions are much more prominent. According to G. Kress and T. Van Leeuwen's (1996) approach, the small pictures on page 15 mean that maybe there are some men who could be a little anxious and maybe there are some black women who are happy, but this is certainly not the norm. What is prominent are the hysterical women shown in big pictures on pages 14-17.

Example 2. In chapter 4, entitled: "Adrenalin" risk sports is presented by a man who is skydiving (pp.32-34) and a woman boxer on page 35. At first sight this can be analyzed as a representation of equality in sports, however, during the interview with the woman a negative stereotype can be seen through the questions that the interviewer asks: *"Do you know how many professional female boxers there are? Is it easy for a woman to be a professional boxer? What do your critics say?"* (p.35), implying that it is not "normal" for a woman to box because "boxing is a man's sport". Although the listening tapes that accompany this textbook are not analyzed, it can be said that the accent of the woman is clearly a low-class accent from London, which tells us that some women may be professional boxers but only those of a lower socio-economic status.

Example 3. Black women accompanied by males are presented in the topic of music (pp.11 and 41), maintaining the stereotype that Blacks are good at singing, dancing and playing instruments. By including Blacks in music, the book company perpetuates the traditional roles and positions of Black women in society.

Example 4. In chapter 7, entitled: "Party", the song *"It's my party and I'll cry if I want to"* is presented and the activity begins by asking students to look at the picture that shows a woman crying when she sees a couple leaving her party together and they have to answer the question: *"What do you think the song is about?"* (p.64). After listening to the song, students are asked to identify the three people in the picture: the hostess, Johnny and Judy and to talk about the relationship among them. Finally, they have to cross out the extra word in each verse. This activity is especially prejudicial for young girls using this book because, instead of opening a discussion about relationships in the sixties – the song was composed in the sixties - as compared to those nowadays, the text represents women as emotionally crying for `their prince charming´. This song deals with women as being emotional and sentimental and it is up to the teacher to question the subtle prejudice against women. There is nothing in the entire textbook that presents men in the same light.

 Example 5

> *And now I'm in trouble – serious trouble. Silence has made the problem much greater. If I had told him before, it wouldn't have become such a big issue. If I had been brave enough to admit that I was 11 years older than him, I wouldn't be in this crazy situation now. I lie about jobs, years abroad and education; he wonders how I've managed to fit so much living into my life; I conveniently can't remember the music of my teenage years. The other day, I even hid my passport under a pile of papers. :o I'm worried*

about organising a get-together with my friends in case one of them says something like, 'Doesn't she look good for her age.' The longer I remain silent, the more likely he is to find out and I'm frightened. For once in a very long time I've found someone who makes me happy and I don't want to lose it. I know that if I was a man, I would n ever have got into this mess. Eleven years' difference is nothing for a man. But it's the

Other way round and the world judges older women harshly and I'm afraid he would do the same. So I have become an ageist and a liar and I have no one to blame but myself. (Inside Out pp. 129)

Example 6. Chapter 15, entitled: "Age", there is an article about a woman and how she "turned into a liar" because she refused to say her real age to her younger boyfriend (pp.129-130). She regrets not having told the truth. This article shows a hidden agenda since it seems to be "normal" for a man to go out with a younger woman without having to hide his identity, but not the other way around. Even though there are two pages dedicated to this text, the book company prefers to pay attention only to grammar structures and, this way, becomes an accomplice to mainstream ideology.

Example 7. The last chapter of the book entitled "Review 2", contains a letter from a tourist visiting Vietnam (p.138) in which there is a picture of a Vietnamese woman walking barefooted with a cow in a field. This picture is not a close-up but the woman is seen from a great distance. She is not inviting or demanding any relationship with the viewer. Neither is she looking for contact with the viewer; hence "We" can see her as an object of contemplation with which "We" do not need to identify. The polarity between "Us" and "Them" is clear in this example.

To sum up, this book company does not question prejudice and ideology. On the contrary, a conservative worldview is shown in the entire book and it is left to the users to counter omissions, prejudice and negative stereotypes.

5.2 Women's representation in New Headway OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Example 1

Historical and outstanding figures in the textbook

Male	**Female**
1- Charles prince of Wales	1- J.K. Rowling
pag. 18 - 19	pag. 54 - 55
2- Vincent Van Gogh	2- Emmeline Pankhurst
pag. 22 - 23	pag. 99
3- William Shakespeare	3- Mother Theresa
pag. 26 – 27	pag. 106
4- Calvin Klein	
pag. 56 - 57	
5- Mao Zedong	
pag. 66 - 67	
6- Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes)	
pag. 90 - 91	
7- Charles Darwin	
pag. 98	
8- Galileo Galilei	

pag. 99

9- Sigmund Freud

pag.99

10- Elvis Presley

pag.99

11- Steve Bennett (Britain's leading

 rocket scientist)

 pag. 41

12- Cristiano Ronaldo (footballer)

 pag. 59

13- Archimedes

 pag. 92

The data show that male representations outnumber female representations. This unequal gender representation demonstrates that this textbook promotes a stereotyped ideology where men are still –this book was recently published- portrayed as more outstanding than women. This description emphasizes the old prejudiced values that position men at the center and women as inferior at the periphery.

 The author fails to take the opportunity to discuss the issue of sex difference. None of the texts opens a discussion about the reasons behind this inequality which is a lost opportunity to foster tolerance and understanding.

5.3 Social minority groups in face2face CAMBRIDGE

Example 1

Chapter 5B, entitled: "The young ones" there are the only two pictures in which Blacks are prominent in the entire textbook. However, one is a Black footballer and the

other is a rapper (pp.49) which means that this textbook shows the old misconceived

topic that Blacks are only good at sport and music and hence, they are not reliable nor

believable for any other occupation. In this example the lesson deals with prefixes and

students have to make sentences using prefixes as in the example: *I overspent again last*

month. Then there is a discussion about the factors that make young people successful,

but it is obvious that Black people can only be successful through music or sports. In

this lesson it can be seen a description of minorities that has nothing to do with the

reality of the students using this textbook and today's ordinary Europeans.

The question for this lesson could have been: why didn't the publisher include Black

doctors, lawyers or professors? There are two other Blacks in the textbook at a party,

but they are not fore grounded.

Example 2

The Pros and Cons

He'll be pleased if I phone to ask how he is.

It will make me look considerate and he likes considerate people.

He'll be reassure to see that I haven't lost interest,

which might make him happy and then I'll have done him a favour.

If I phone him right now I'll get to speak to him sooner

than I will if I sit around waiting for him to phone me.

He might no want to phone me from work in case someone hears

him and begins (or continues) to suspect that there's something

between us.

If I want to and don't, aren't I being a bit immature?

We're both adults. Does it matter, with adults, who makes the

first move?

But there's always the chance he'll back off if I come on too strong

The less keen I appear, the more keen he's likely to be,

And I phoned him twice on Thursday and once on Friday.

He must therefore be fully aware that it's his turn, not mine.

If I make it too easy for him he'll assume I'm too easy,

while if I make no effort, that leaves him with more of a challenge. (Face2face pp. 82)

I should demonstrate that I have a sense of proportion,

his work must come first for a while and I shouldn't mind waiting

For all I know he could have gone off me already

and if I don't phone I can always say, later, that I went off him first.

Example 2 of CAMBRIDGE presents a poem that comes with an illustration of a woman sitting next to a telephone thinking *"to phone or not to phone, that is the question"*. The poem contains idiomatic expressions such as *make no effort, make the first move, go off* , in which the purpose is to practice reading a "moderrn" poem and later discussing whether it is better to be a man or a woman by surveying the class and

talking about the results of the survey. The authors leave it up to the students to give their conclusions. For instance, in the pair work exercise, question 4: *do you think a man would have a similar dilemma?* Is a great opportunity to address gender issues and foster understanding. Finally, the text does not discuss who decides the status of people in society and who benefits from these positionings.

5.4 Discussion

Based on the examples provided above, the three publishing companies depict biased representations of female characters. The findings demonstrate that males are represented in a more positive light than females. The fact that many men nowadays share the housework and child care is not mentioned. The causes for positioning men in the center and women in the periphery are not discussed. The consequences and effects of gender discrimination can be detrimental to some learners that use these books, while the many contributions of women to society are not mentioned.

On the other hand, Macmillan/Heinemann, Cambridge and Oxford are not in line with today's Spain and Catalonia, where women are increasingly in higher positions such as ministers of the government, for instance, or as presidents of universities. Although, there is still a long way to go for women in general, the fact that they have also come a long way cannot be denied. Moreover, it is taken for granted that the whole world follows the rules of an upwardly British society, since the books analyzed are used by many students around the world.

The exclusion and negative portrayal of women in the coursebooks examined may have serious implications from an inclusive pedagogical perspective. Examples of sexism are found in written texts as well as in images. Men in traditional roles of rescuers, breadwinners, adventurers, etc., are found whilst women have been assigned conservative roles of homemakers, of being emotional, nervous and incapable of coping

with stressful situations. That is, stereotypical jobs for both women and men are expressed.

The texts presuppose that Blacks are incapable of doing any other job well, except being singers, dancers and athletes. This stereotypical attitude is pernicious for the many Black females trying to do a good job in other areas where they are not believable because of the prejudiced knowledge that has become naturalized in society about Blacks. No-one can claim that these coursebooks ignore Blacks but music and sports seem to be the only occupational areas a Black person can be successful in. That is, some progress has been made by publishers, but it does not reflect reality as it is, since nowadays it is not uncommon to find Black doctors, lawyers, business people and teachers all over in spite of the fact that, the same as women, Blacks have still a long way to go in society.

6. Conclusions

After the analysis, results and discussion of all of the selected coursebooks, it is confirmed that EFL/ESL coursebooks show a sexist, racist and linguicist attitude towards certain social groups. Hence, coursebooks are not in line with the advances of European society in terms of gender roles, ethnicity and language ideology. As a result, the implications for classroom procedures are important and must be mentioned. As stated by R. Ellis (1997), it is necessary to evaluate materials before, during or after they are used as a way of being prepared to change, drop or adapt the activities in the coursebooks that are harmful to our students' needs and situations.

From examining the chosen images, it can be concluded that men and women are portrayed unequally, with men depicted in a positive light and women in a negative light. The world of an affluent society is emphasized throughout the textbook (e.g., traveling around the world, the world of business and entertainment). The chapters of

the coursebooks are only interesting to upper-class students who can identify with the

books' characters and environments.

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