

A CDA-Driven Study of World English Series Published by Cengage Heinle

Mohammad Amin Mozaheb, Jalal Farzaneh Dehkordi, Khojasteh Hosseinzadehpilehvar

Abstract—English Language Teaching (ELT) is widely promoted across the world. ELT textbooks play pivotal roles in the mentioned process. Since biases of authors have been an issue of continuing interest to analysts over the past few years, the present study seeks to analyze an ELT textbook using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). To obtain the goal of the study, the listening section of a book called World English 3 (new edition) has been analyzed in terms of the cultures and countries mentioned in the listening section of the book using content-based analysis. The analysis indicates biases towards certain cultures. Moreover, some countries are shown as rich and powerful countries, while some others have been shown as poor ones without considering the history behind them.

Keywords—ELT, textbooks, critical discourse analysis, World English.

I. INTRODUCTION

ENGLISH is the language of instruction in a large number of countries worldwide such as a Korean high school, a private language school in Iran, a Chinese polytechnic, a secondary school in Turkey, a Nigerian college, a university in Spain, etc. That is why English and its teaching have been the focal points of many studies (e.g. [1], [2] to name two).

One of the most challenging issues in the realm of ELT is the matter of contents of ELT textbooks. In different countries, ELT textbooks have been the main focus of research for policy makers and practitioners [3]. According to Graddol [4], ‘On the one hand, the availability of English as a global language is accelerating globalization. On the other, the globalization is accelerating [the use of English]. Referring to the number of learners learning English, he says that ‘... there could be around 2 billion people simultaneously learning English in the world’s schools and colleges and as independent adults. Nearly a third of the world population will all be trying to learn English at the same time’ [4, p. 101].

Using CDA, which its “primary focus is on the effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs, and in particular on discursive aspects of power relations and inequalities” [5, p. 8], a number of scholars have carried out research studies on different ELT books taught across the world (see for example [6], [7] to name just a few).

Phillipson [8, p. 47] talks about “English linguistic imperialism” and believes that “the dominance of English is

asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities”. Phillipson [8], [9] maintains that that the USA and Britain coordinate and assist considerably the Centre (the imperialist hegemonies) by the diffusion of English language, and its cultural domain to support the commercial and political interests of such countries. Also, Hartman and Judd [10] believe that ESL classroom materials have cultural significance and due influence on learners. Elyas and Badawood [11] emphasize on the significance of the issues of socio-cultural identity, cultural representation in EFL classrooms and the socio-political environment produced in such EFL classrooms and warn about the mixed messages which are conveyed. In a recent study, Xiong and Qian [12, p. 75] investigated “ideologies of English in present-day China with a special focus on textbook discourse.” They conclude that the following issues such as “the study finds evidence of: (a) a selective representation of the history of English, (b) shallow sociolinguistic explanations, and (c) grammatical prescriptivism” have been represented in the textbooks [13, p. 75].

In another study, Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh [14, p. 67] examined the linguistic demonstration of male and female social actors in the Interchange Third Edition, concluding that “it seems that attempts have been made to bring women from margin to the foreground.” Moreover, Hashemi and Ghanizadeh [15, p. 37] analyzed “the impact of CDA on TEFL students’ critical thinking (CT) ability in Reading Journalistic Texts classes.” They concluded that “CDA has a positive and significant influence on learners’ critical thinking ability” [15, p. 37]. Besides, using a CDA-driven approach, Weninger and Kiss [13, p. 1] analyzed culture in EFL textbooks, saying that:

(1) that learners’ meaning making in the classroom tends to be heavily guided and (2) that the images and texts, even those with supposed cultural meaning or focus, seem to foster mainly on linguistic competence. The article makes the case that images and texts should be harnessed more explicitly to develop a critical and reflexive understanding of culture, self, and other.

Additionally, Bahman and Rahimi [16, p. 273] studied different areas of “gender-bias in representation of women and men in three volumes of English textbooks taught in the high schools of Iran. According to Bahman and Rahimi [16, p. 273].”

The presence of men was more highlighted than that of women regarding names, nouns, pronouns and adjectives attributed to them. In regard to firstness, also, male-attributed

M. A. Mozaheb is with the Imam Sadiq University, Iran, Islamic Republic Of (corresponding author, e-mail: mozaheb.ma@gmail.com).

Khojasteh Hosseinzadehpilehvar is affiliated with Imam Sadiq University, Iran, Islamic Republic Of.

Jalal Farzaneh Dehkordi is an Assistant Professor in Imam Sadiq University, Iran, Islamic Republic Of.

terms came first more frequently than those of females. In reading passages, male characters appeared more frequently than female characters. Moreover, these textbooks contained many male-generics in which women were almost invisible. Also, sexism was detected in regard to animal representations. Furthermore, Lewis [17] mentions that different books should be studied using CDA in order to decode different ideological layers hidden and embedded in the textbooks.

Among different ELT textbooks taught in the Iranian context, the revisited version of World English (2015) is a series which attracted the attention of learners and practitioners due to the books' focus on speaking as well as other skills by using TED talks. The authors of World English claim that the book series covers different cultures and can be used in various countries of the world, as the name per se suggests. Moreover, the books says: World English is a four-skills program which uses lively and compelling content, images, and video to teach the language that learners need to succeed in their classrooms and daily lives. The series is built upon clear and practical learning goals which are presented and practiced through motivating themes and topics. World English uses real people, real places, and real language to connect English language learners to the world [18, p. 1].

Linked to other studies focusing on ELT textbooks from a CDA-driven perspective, the present study seeks to analyze the Listening Section of World English 3 and answer the following research question:

1. Is the listening section of the new edition of World English 3 biased towards certain cultures and countries of the World?

II. METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative approach for analyzing the listening section of World English 3 (new edition) based on Chase & Johannsen [18], the authors of the study also utilized content-based analysis in an attempt to answer the posed research question of the study. World English 3 is claimed to be a competency-based book designed for EFL students interested in learning English from different world countries. The book consists of 12 units which focus on subjects said to be needed for EFL learners.

III. PROCEDURE

In an attempt to answer the research question, the researchers merged content-analysis and social semiotic approach. In other words, to witness the representation of different cultures and countries in the listening section of World English 3, the authors scanned the listening section of each unit. Following this process for finding the countries mentioned in each unit, the researchers tallied the numbers and then meticulously analyzed the content of each unit related to each culture in order to see whether the book used certain cultures or different cultural issues covering various world countries.

According to National Geographic Learning [19]:

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Learning, is a leading educational publisher of school, higher education, ELT, library and reference materials. At National Geographic Learning, we believe that an engaged and motivated learner will be a successful one, and we design our materials to motivate. We believe that learning can be exciting, inspiring, and transformational. Through our learning programs, we want learners to experience the excitement and joy of learning that National Geographic explorers, scientists, writers and photographers experience. We share real stories from National Geographic that increase the learners' knowledge of the world and everything in it. We illustrate these materials with stunning National Geographic photography, video, and illustrations that bring the world to the classroom and the classroom to life. At National Geographic Learning, we have a responsibility to future generations to provide strong educational skills and an awareness of their role as caretakers of the planet.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

TABLE I
THE NUMBER OF TIMES EACH COUNTRY/CONTINENT WAS MENTIONED IN THE LISTENING SECTION OF WORLD ENGLISH 3

| Countries | Number of Times Repeated | Percent (%) |
|--|--------------------------|-------------|
| United States | 8 | 14.28 |
| Mongolia | 1 | 1.78 |
| Mexico (Mexico City) | 4 | 7.1 |
| Canada | 3 | 5.3 |
| Japan | 4 | 7.1 |
| Switzerland | 1 | 1.78 |
| Greece | 1 | 1.78 |
| Argentina | 2 | 3.6 |
| France | 2 | 3.6 |
| Europe | 1 | 1.78 |
| India | 3 | 5.3 |
| Turkey | 1 | 1.78 |
| Asian Countries | 1 | 1.78 |
| Persia (Iran) | 2 | 3.6 |
| Sweden | 1 | 1.78 |
| Ethiopia | 1 | 1.78 |
| Malaysia | 1 | 1.78 |
| Indians of North America (North American Tribes) | 3 | 5.3 |
| Africa | 1 | 1.78 |
| Aztec | 2 | 3.6 |
| England | 6 | 10.7 |
| Thailand | 1 | 1.78 |
| Native Americans | 1 | 1.78 |
| Roman Empire | 1 | 1.78 |
| Scotland (Italy) | 1 | 1.78 |
| China | 3 | 5.3 |
| Wales | 1 | 1.78 |
| Total | 56 | 100 |

To find an answer for the research question of the study, the audio scripts of all the 12 units of World English 3 textbook were scanned and the authors counted the number of times each country was mentioned in the listening section (see Table

D). According to the table, the US was mentioned eight times or 14.28%. Following that England with six times or 10.7% is the next country in terms of frequency. Mexico and Japan are the other countries, each with three times of repetition or 7.1%. Afterwards, Canada, India, China and Indians of North America were mentioned three times or 5.3%. Argentina, France, Iran and Aztec were repeated twice or 3.6%. Continents like Europe, Africa and Asia, in addition to some other parts of the world like Mongolia, Greece, Switzerland, Turkey, Sweden, Ethiopia, Malaysia, Roman Empire (Italy), Wales and Scotland have the chance to be repeated one time or 1.78%.

The analysis of countries shows that North American

countries (e.g., the US, Canada and Mexico) as well as the UK, including Wales and Scotland, were repeated more than other countries like Greece, Switzerland, Sweden, Ethiopia or Malaysia. Moreover, Italy was mentioned as the Roman Empire. In order to clear the issue, the authors used the word Italy instead of the Roman Empire in some other parts of the book. However, it is not the case about the word Persia which was used instead of the word Iran.

The content analysis of the listening section also indicates that a number of topics and themes were linked to certain cultures and countries, as summarized in Table II. The analysis of each section is written using italicized format inside the table.

TABLE II
TOPICS AND THEMES RELATED TO CERTAIN WORLD COUNTRIES IN THE LISTENING SECTION OF WORLD ENGLISH 3

| Country | Description |
|-------------------|--|
| The United States | 1. New Orleans (P. T-170) Everybody talking about hurricanes 2. Los Angeles (P. T-173) Finding lots of fossils. (<i>Analysis: the U. S. does not have an ancient culture, but in the text they emphasize the ancient culture to make a history up for themselves although it is not related to humans.</i>) 3. New York (P. T-173) having one of the world's longest subway systems. Emphasizing the old culture of New York by finding a very old wall when making subway. (<i>Analysis: not only has a very modern civil culture but also an old culture.</i>) 4. (P. T-174) American president uses volunteer soldiers for tasting his food while Nero used the tasters (<i>Analysis: symbol of democracy and love for the president</i>). |
| Turkey | 1. (P. T-170) 3000 years of civilization by using coins |
| Argentina | 1. (P. T-170) drought, cattle are dying because they don't have enough grass to eat. |
| France | 1. (P. T-170) Record-breaking heat waves, 20000 deaths in Europe from the heat |
| England | 1. Stonehenge (P. T 175-176): repeated three times: a) ancient England b) mysterious England c) miraculous England <i>Analysis: England is shown as an ancient, mysterious country with a scientific background.</i> |
| New Delhi | 1. (P. T-170) The biggest climate problem is flooding, causing lots of problems including diseases (<i>Analysis: poverty is bolded</i>) 2. (P. T-174) Indian authority used a man Mathura Prasad (a man) for tasting his food (<i>Analysis: this man is a symbol of dictatorship</i>). |
| Persia | 1. (P. T 170-171) In the year 1294, the king orders to use paper money, merchants closed their shops because people didn't think bills were valuable. Finally, the king changed his orders and killed the man who first told him about the paper money! (<i>Analysis: the King is an illogical man, Persians are anti-development</i>). |
| Sweden | 1. (P. T-171) The first paper money printed in Sweden and became successful. (<i>Analysis: Implying that Europe is a well-developed continent</i>). |
| Mars | 1. (P. T 177) possibility of colonizing Mars |
| Canada | 1. (P. T. 177) International Space Station (the idea of colonizing space mentioned in another conversation about): Growing vegetables in the spaceships. <i>Analysis: For being able to travel to other spaces they want to have the technology of producing food. Colonizing the other spaces.</i> |
| Mexico | 1. (P T-173) emphasizing the ancient Aztec civilization. |
| China | 1. (P T- 175) <i>Analysis: While the Native Americans are somewhat logical about the possibility of existence of the sea giant, the Chinese's belief about the sea giants seems superstitious.</i> |

The analysis of the listening section of World English 3 (new edition) indicated that the authors of the book are biased towards certain countries and try to bold a number of countries like the US and the UK, while ignoring some of the great cultures of the world. Moreover, some countries like Sweden are depicted as modern countries, while countries like India are shown as poor countries.

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