

DENDRINOS, Bessie. **The EFL Textbook and Ideology** Athens: Grivas Publications. 1992. Pp. xi, 256.

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Most teacher training programmes, be they pre- or in-service, involve some analysis and evaluation of EFL textbooks. This is usually in the context of a syllabus design component of the course, with trainees being asked to determine the organising principle of the textbook or to evaluate its coverage and treatment of particular language items. When we ask our students to analyse material critically, it is usually in relation to its suitability for a particular learning context or group of learners, reference perhaps being made to whether or not some aspect of the content is likely to cause offence to a particular cultural or religious group. Publishers too are sensitive to culture as well as overt sexism and even issue guidelines to authors. We do not, however, often pose questions as to the nature of ELT materials as discourse; nor do we seek to examine the ideology that underpins this discourse critically. These are the kinds of questions to which Bessie Dendrinis seeks answers in *The ELT Textbook and Ideology* and in so doing she fills a major gap in the FL teacher education literature.

The author states in the preface that her envisaged audience is EFL teachers on in-service training programmes as well as pre-service trainees at undergraduate or postgraduate level. The book in fact evolved from Dr Dendrinis's Applied Linguistics course in the English Department at the University of Athens, a course in which she sought to provide her undergraduate students there with a critical orientation to published materials. This would seem a particularly worthy aim in Greece, an EFL context itself and, therefore, arguably a setting in which the published coursebook is all the more unlikely to have its hegemony challenged and its content questioned. The other impetus for the book came from Dendrinis's work as head author with the Greek Ministry of Education of a textbook series for secondary schools. This series, of which she is justifiably proud, provides many of the examples used and gave Dendrinis first-hand experience of the decision making process and, I would assume, the sometimes delicate negotiations with publishers and co-authors familiar to most of the other EFL authors whose work she draws on for further examples.

Dendrinis begins in her introduction by emphasising the power of the textbook in education, which is, she notes, far greater than that of the individual teacher or teacher trainer. While time on training programmes is almost always

allotted to materials design and adaptation, it is an unfortunate truth that the day to day reality of heavy timetables and correction loads often means that teachers are forced to rely on published coursebooks and to reduce their preparation time by following instructions in the teachers' book fairly closely. Selection of such powerful texts is, therefore, all the more important. It is Dendrinis's view that informed selection depends on an ability to discern the values and attitudes that underpin the text. She is concerned not only with values and attitudes in relation to theories of language and language learning, but to educational value systems and indeed the social construction of the learner, particularly the school-age learner. These concerns are undeniably valid.

If we, as ELT practitioners and researchers, have perhaps been somewhat remiss when it comes to critical discourse analysis of the EFL textbook, those in the sociology of education have provided a number of valuable insights on the school textbook in the more general sense of the term. On seeing the title *The EFL Textbook and Ideology* what I had hoped to find was an account of the role of the textbook in the discourse of ELT and its function as a textual exponent of ideology. Dendrinis provides just such an account and a highly illuminating one at that in her first two chapters.

One of the great strengths of Dendrinis's work is that she draws on the literature in a wide range of fields, such as sociology of education to support her own analysis of the discourse of EFL published materials. She provides a fascinating review of some of the literature on the role of school textbooks in defining knowledge and pedagogical practices. She points out that this powerful position has been enhanced by national curricula and the resultant selection of textbooks at the national level.

Dendrinis reviews two major accounts of the power of the textbook: that of Olson (1980), who sees linguistic forms as creating an 'objective' discourse that seemingly emanates from a source other than the author and is, therefore, somehow beyond criticism; and Luke et al. (1983), who view the power of the textbook as resting in the fact that it is endowed with institutional authority. Myers' (1992) recent work is also of relevance here. He examines science textbooks as a means of charting the positioning of 'facts' in disciplines noting that when a 'fact' reaches a textbook having passed through a range of other genres it can be said to represent a consensus that has been arrived at by the discourse community concerned. An analysis of how far ELT textbooks reflect consensus in the ELT discourse community with regard to approaches and procedures would be an interesting study.

Myers' work would seem to provide a good bridge between Olson and Luke et al. Dendrinis does, however, find such a bridge in the shape of the views of Baker and Freebody (1989), who contend that it is neither linguistic features of the text nor institutional endorsement that impart authority, but the ways in which

the school and the individual teacher employ the textbook. Clearly teachers can and do contest or even subvert the aims of textbooks through their classroom practices as Dendrinós demonstrates through her analysis of some classroom discourse. On this basis she questions Luke et al.'s (1983) claim that teachers are, for pupils, surrogate authors of textbooks in the absence of any discernible authorial voice.

The fact that the EFL textbook is distinguishable from other textbooks (as Dendrinós herself notes in the following chapter) is, for me, the key to the issue. EFL textbooks are not made up of the kind of knowledge claims that are the essence of other types of textbook. Although the theories of language and learning that condition syllabus design are, of course, frequently controversial, they are less likely to be seen as attributable to the textbook author than may be the case of knowledge claims in other types of textbook. It is perhaps because of this that the role of ELT textbooks in language learning has recently been called into question by ELT researchers.

Dendrinós begins a detailed discussion of the EFL textbook as opposed to other textbooks by drawing a distinction in terms of genre. She notes the fact that other instructional texts can be classified as expository narratives whereas the modern EFL textbook inevitably includes a wide variety of text types, many of which have been previously published elsewhere (viz. magazines and newspapers). She also comments on the tremendous emphasis placed on design and artwork in EFL textbooks as opposed to their counterparts in other subjects. Changes in layout and design, she suggests, are a reflection in changing theories of learning. Although the transition from one approach to another has been accompanied by parallel changes in design and layout, I believe that this reflects changing 'tastes' in design at least as much as it does changes in pedagogy. Many an artwork decision is made by designers for 'aesthetic' or commercial reasons, little thought being given to possible implications for learners and teachers.

Dendrinós argues that the authority of the EFL textbook lies in the fact that it is a textual emanation of the discourses of the institutions of a 'target culture' which she sees as alien to both teacher and learner in the EFL context. Both the homogeneity of Western urban culture across national boundaries and its capacity to break down into much smaller discourse communities leads me to question how far this can hold true. I would also question her claim that authors of EFL textbooks consider themselves to be authorities on the 'target culture', unless this is thought to be a kind of idealized version of Western culture, in which case a materials writer living in Milan is in just as good a position as one living and working in Bristol. Her real point seems to be that EFL textbooks written by authors from Kachru's (1985) 'inner circle' (the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand) and published by multinational publishers fare better in the market place, because teachers and learners in EFL contexts perceive them as

being more prestigious and authoritative. I believe that this is an issue that requires closer examination. Most of us in Spain can readily call to mind EFL coursebooks written by native speakers of Spanish languages that sell extremely well. Obtaining statistics on sales from major distributors and a survey of coursebooks adopted in state education systems would be illuminating. Even if it is the case that international publishers sell more copies of their EFL coursebooks than national or local publishers, the resources these publishers have in terms of marketing and distribution, not to mention the money that is poured into every stage of the production of the book or series, probably leads to the creation of a better-selling commodity for reasons far less abstract than the authority and prestige vested in the author or international publisher. A by-product of this selling power may well be greater prestige and authority though it is fellow material writers that tend to be most conscious of this. Students (and inexperienced teachers) are usually blissfully ignorant of the names of authors or publishers whose books they have used.

Another source of authority she traces through instructional rubrics. She notes that in the majority of the examples she examined there are strongly framed directives which consistently use action verbs. It strikes me that the materials writers and publishers are often conditioned in their choice of form by layout considerations along with what are probably well-founded assumptions about the target audience. At elementary levels the use of simple imperatives is far easier for the learner to handle. Directives framed in other ways, apart from being less transparent, simply take up more space. Dendrinis makes the important point that verbs of cognition and perception would allow for a desirable reduction in the authority (or perhaps the authoritarian ring) of the textbook rubric. She also quite rightly adds that where the learners' knowledge of the target language is limited, use of the L1 in instructions would seem to be the logical solution. Clearly this is not viable for internationally-marketed publications and is, as Dendrinis notes, a strong argument in favour of locally-produced materials.

The EFL Textbook and Ideology most obviously begins to fulfil its stated purpose of providing a source for trainees in chapter 3. It should be said, however, that it is a sophisticated source that would prove daunting for many, but which provides an introduction to and overview of current social theory. The chapter, which is entitled 'Ideology in Education and Discourse', reviews the literature on ideology in education situating the work of educationalists like Bernstein in relation to the social theories of scholars such as Foucault, Althusser and Gramsci. Likewise in her overview of ideology in discourse Dendrinis traces a path through Eco, Bakhtin and Voloshnikov to the work of Bourdieu, Fairclough and Kress and Hodge. The chapter concludes with a position statement to the effect that ideology is inextricably connected to discourse and that texts are emanations of that discourse. Analysis of the EFL textbook, Dendrinis argues,

therefore not only provides insights into the ideology of the textbook itself but into the ideology of the institutions that produce it.

Chapter 4 provides excellent background reading for trainees and would be seen by them as immediately relevant, involving, as it does, a discussion of the work on educational value systems and concomitant approaches to ELT curriculum and syllabus design. Here Dendrinos draws on the work of Clark (1987) and White (1988) among others. While Clark ultimately sees it as viable to marry up the positive features of classical humanism, reconstruction and progressivism, Dendrinos does not. Instead she sees a task-based syllabus, which she regards as coherent with a progressivist value system, as being the only approach that can be held up as truly learner- and learning-centred.

The chapter that I enjoyed most and found most thought provoking was the final chapter. Here Dendrinos homes in on the ideological underpinnings of the instructional texts in EFL textbooks. She discusses issues such as the overrepresentation of 'white, upper-middle class men under forty' in international ELT publications and the fact that the world of the ELT textbook is typically somewhat akin to the sanitized homogeneous world of advertising or situation comedy. She draws a distinction between 'open' and 'closed' texts. The former she describes as instructional texts and accompanying tasks which allow the learner to participate in the construction of meaning through interpretation while the latter invite no such participation. Multinational publishers come off rather badly here and I did feel that Dendrinos was perhaps a little unfair in choosing materials that were originally published in the early eighties for comparison with the series that she co-authored in 1988, though the fact that many of these international publications continue to sell well even today is evidence of the power of these publishers and, perhaps, of the fact that they see little need to 'mend their ways'.

My only heartfelt doubts about *The ELT Textbook and Ideology* relate to some irritating features of its layout. Though Dendrinos claims that individual bibliographies for each chapter were provided to assist the reader, I found this rather awkward. It might be argued that if the book were to be used as a university textbook a teacher might set the chapter bibliography as pre-reading, but I believe students and trainees are better off learning to cope with a bibliography organised in accordance with the conventions of Applied Linguistics. I was also somewhat irritated by the fact that to find the source of extracts from ELT publications one has to go to the endnotes for each chapter. Since the number of published ELT textbooks used as examples is not so great it would have been more 'reader-friendly' to simply provide a normal citation or an abbreviation of the title. These are perhaps decisions that rested with the publisher, but they did detract from my enjoyment of what is, in every other sense, a valuable contribution to the fields of Teacher Education and Critical Discourse Studies.

I believe that *The ELT Textbook and Ideology* will find a readership among ELT practitioners on post-graduate courses and sophisticated pre-service trainees. It will also be of interest to many in Sociology of Education and to others working in Critical Discourse Studies. And in much the same way as advertising agencies apparently snapped up copies of Leech's (1966) pioneering study of the language of advertising and went on to make use of the insights he offered in the construction of ever more sophisticated campaigns, publishing companies, and more particularly multinational publishing companies, are likely to show a good deal of interest in Dendrinos's book. One can only hope that they take on board much of what she says to produce EFL textbooks that offer the learner a complex world that does not ignore minorities, women, the elderly and the possibility of conflict, while providing material that addresses students' needs in terms of learning English for multicultural communication.

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