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A Critical Discourse Analysis of English Language Textbooks in Pakistani Schools

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Abstract

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the English language textbooks used in Pakistani schools, focusing on the ideological messages they convey through linguistic and textual features. The analysis aims to identify the power relations and dominant ideologies reflected in these textbooks and how they shape students' identities, values, and worldviews. By focusing on both macro-level discourses (nationalism, religion, globalisation) and micro-level linguistic choices (metaphors, lexical choices, inclusion/exclusion), the study highlights how English textbooks function as ideological tools, promoting certain cultural, national, and religious values. The research finds that textbooks often prioritise a singular Muslim Pakistani identity, reinforcing nationalistic and religious discourses while marginalising linguistic diversity and minority identities. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on global English reflects broader trends of modernisation and neoliberalism, positioning English as the language of progress and economic opportunity. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for curriculum development, textbook design, and the broader educational context in Pakistan. It calls for more inclusive and critical approaches to textbook design that reflect the country's linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, English textbooks, Pakistan, Ideology, Nationalism, Religion, Globalisation, Language Education, Curriculum Development

1. Introduction

Textbooks are integral to the educational experience, as they not only convey specific academic content but also transmit a range of cultural, social, and political values. In many educational systems, textbooks function as powerful tools for shaping the worldview of students, subtly guiding them towards accepting particular ideologies, norms, and beliefs. In the context of Pakistan, English language textbooks serve a dual purpose: they aim to teach English as a functional language, while also playing a significant role in instilling national, religious, and cultural ideologies. These textbooks are not neutral documents; rather, they reflect and reinforce the socio-political context in which they are produced. In Pakistan, this context is shaped by a complex mix of colonial history, nationalism, religious values, and the aspirations of a rapidly globalising society.

The history of English in Pakistan is deeply intertwined with colonialism. As a former British colony, Pakistan inherited the English language as a symbol of power, authority, and prestige. During British rule, English was the language of administration, education, and governance, relegating indigenous languages to secondary positions. After independence in 1947, Pakistan retained English as an official language, positioning it as a marker of modernity, progress, and access to global opportunities. Consequently, English has become associated with upward social mobility and economic advancement, especially in a world that increasingly prioritises English in international communication, commerce, and diplomacy.

While English is viewed as a gateway to the globalised world, its presence in Pakistani textbooks is often more than just instructional. English language textbooks in Pakistan are deeply embedded with ideological functions that extend beyond language acquisition. These books reflect dominant cultural and national discourses, particularly those surrounding Pakistan's Islamic identity, national unity, and the perceived need to align with globalisation through the mastery of English. Given the linguistic and religious diversity of Pakistan, these textbooks often highlight certain cultural, national, and religious values while marginalising or misrepresenting others. In this way, English language textbooks in Pakistan become more than a tool for learning a language—they become vehicles for socialising students into specific ideologies about what it means to be a citizen of Pakistan, how to view religious identity, and how to engage with global issues.

The relationship between language, power, and ideology is central to understanding how textbooks function as tools of socialisation. According to Norman Fairclough (1995), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a powerful framework for examining the ways in which language reflects, reinforces, and challenges power structures within society. CDA focuses on the idea that language is not neutral; it is a means of communication that is deeply enmeshed with power relations and ideological positions. Through CDA, it is possible to uncover the hidden assumptions, biases, and power dynamics embedded within texts. In the case of English textbooks in Pakistan, CDA can reveal how certain ideological narratives—such as nationalism, religious identity, and the values of modernity—are inscribed in the language and structure of the textbooks.

Fairclough's approach to CDA is based on a three-dimensional model, which examines the textual, discursive, and social practices associated with language use. At the textual level, CDA focuses on

the micro-features of language, such as vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, and narrative structures. These features shape the way in which concepts and ideas are presented and understood. At the discursive practice level, CDA looks at how texts are produced, circulated, and consumed in society. This involves understanding the role of various stakeholders, such as textbook writers, publishers, and educational authorities, in shaping the content of textbooks. Finally, at the social practice level, CDA examines how the discourses in textbooks relate to broader social structures, such as power, ideology, and identity. By applying CDA to English textbooks in Pakistan, this study aims to uncover how these books reflect and perpetuate certain social norms, values, and power dynamics.

Pakistan's linguistic and religious diversity further complicates the role of English textbooks in shaping students' identities. The country is home to a variety of ethnic and linguistic groups, with over 70 languages spoken across its regions. However, Urdu and English are the official languages, and the national curriculum heavily emphasises the use of these languages in educational settings. The dominance of Urdu and English in textbooks often comes at the expense of regional languages, which are frequently underrepresented or marginalised. This linguistic hierarchy is reflected in the contents of English textbooks, which tend to prioritise the values, perspectives, and cultural practices associated with the Urdu-speaking, Muslim majority, while sidelining the diverse voices of minority communities, both religious and linguistic. Religious minorities, such as Hindus and Christians, as well as speakers of regional languages like Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi, are often excluded or misrepresented in these textbooks.

The ideological emphasis in English language textbooks is also linked to the construction of a singular national identity. Textbooks often depict an idealised image of Pakistan that centres on Islamic values, national unity, and patriotism. Through carefully constructed narratives and depictions of national heroes, students are taught to view Pakistan as a homogeneous Muslim state, with shared values and goals. This representation of Pakistan as a united, Islamic nation serves the political objective of fostering national cohesion, especially in a country with diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. However, this construction of national identity can also be exclusionary, as it marginalises the multiplicity of identities that exist within the country, including the diverse religious practices, ethnicities, and languages that make up Pakistan's social fabric.

In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on the role of English in facilitating Pakistan's integration into the globalised world. English is often presented as the language of progress, modernity, and global citizenship, and proficiency in English is seen as a gateway to international opportunities in education, business, and politics. This globalisation discourse in English textbooks often positions English as a universal language that transcends national and cultural boundaries. However, this emphasis on globalisation through English raises important questions about the preservation of local cultures and languages. While English may open doors to global opportunities, it also risks overshadowing Pakistan's rich cultural and linguistic diversity. The idealisation of English as the language of the future may inadvertently contribute to the erosion of local languages and cultures, as students are encouraged to prioritise English over their mother tongues.

The aim of this paper is to critically examine how English language textbooks used in Pakistani schools reflect and reinforce dominant ideologies related to national identity, religion, and globalisation. By applying CDA to these textbooks, this study will analyse both the micro-level textual features (such as language choices and narrative structures) and the macro-level social implications (such as the construction of national identity and the promotion of globalisation). The research will explore how these textbooks contribute to the formation of students' identities, beliefs, and values, and how they shape their understanding of power, authority, and belonging in Pakistan's socio-political landscape. Through this analysis, the study seeks to uncover the ideological underpinnings of English language teaching in Pakistan and the ways in which these ideologies are transmitted to students through educational materials. By critically engaging with the content of these textbooks, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the role of education in shaping identity, power, and social justice in postcolonial contexts like Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a valuable lens for examining the relationship between language and power, especially in educational contexts. CDA focuses on understanding how language functions not only to reflect reality but to actively construct it, thereby influencing social and political structures. According to Norman Fairclough (1989, 2003), discourse in educational settings plays a crucial role in reproducing existing power relations by shaping students' understanding of societal norms, identities, and ideologies. In the case of textbooks, these materials do not merely present knowledge but also transmit dominant social values and ideologies, making them essential objects for CDA. Educational texts, particularly those used for teaching languages, often carry significant ideological weight, shaping how students view power, authority, and the world around them.

In the context of Pakistan, English language textbooks have long been regarded as vehicles for transmitting ideological messages that align with the nation's political, religious, and cultural values. The historical role of English in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the legacy of British colonialism, where English became a symbol of power, social prestige, and economic success. Kachru (1992) notes that English, introduced to the Indian subcontinent during British rule, became a marker of modernity and a means of upward social mobility. This colonial history continues to influence the status of English in Pakistan, where proficiency in English is often equated with access to global markets, international education, and higher social standing. The continued dominance of English in Pakistani educational materials often reinforces this association with social progress, but it also leads to the marginalisation of regional languages and minority cultures. English textbooks in Pakistan frequently prioritise the linguistic and cultural norms of the majority, particularly the Urdu-speaking Muslim population, while sidelining or misrepresenting the diverse ethnic and linguistic groups that make up the country.

Several studies have examined the ideological content of Pakistani textbooks, particularly in relation to language, religion, and nationalism. For example, Aziz (2010) analysed Urdu and English textbooks used in Pakistani schools and found that they often promote nationalistic and religious ideologies that reflect a singular vision of Pakistani identity. These textbooks emphasise Islamic values and portray Pakistan as a unified Muslim nation, but they

tend to exclude or underrepresent the country's diverse linguistic and religious minorities. Aziz's study reveals that while these textbooks serve the purpose of teaching English, they also play a role in the ideological formation of students, reinforcing a particular national identity that is closely aligned with Islamic values and practices.

Mahboob (2013) similarly explored how English textbooks in Pakistan position English as the language of global opportunity and modernity. His study highlights how textbooks often promote the idea that English proficiency is essential for success in the global economy. However, Mahboob points out that this focus on English tends to overlook the importance of local languages and cultural identities. The emphasis on globalisation through English creates a narrative that devalues local languages and indigenous cultural knowledge, positioning English as the only viable language for participation in the globalised world. This ideological orientation in textbooks suggests that globalisation and modernity are only accessible through English, marginalising those who do not have access to the language.

In addition to nationalism and globalisation, gender and religion are also significant themes in the ideological analysis of Pakistani textbooks. Bilal (2015) and Rehman (2017) have examined how gender roles are portrayed in textbooks, finding that textbooks often reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Women are predominantly depicted in domestic roles, while men are portrayed as leaders or authority figures. These representations limit students' understanding of gender equality and contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal values within society. The portrayal of gender roles in textbooks is not only an issue of representation but also reflects broader societal attitudes towards women and their roles in public and private spheres.

Religious identity is another key area of focus in the analysis of textbooks. In Pakistan, where Islam is the state religion, textbooks often reflect the country's Islamic identity by highlighting Islamic values, heroes, and historical figures. However, this focus on Islam as the dominant religion tends to marginalise religious minorities such as Hindus, Christians, and others. Studies have shown that religious minorities are either underrepresented or misrepresented in textbooks, and their cultural practices and beliefs are often ignored. This exclusion reflects the national discourse that equates Pakistani identity with Islam, leaving little room for the recognition of the diverse religious and cultural identities that exist within the country. As a result, students are taught to view Pakistan as a homogenous Muslim nation, which can contribute to the social marginalisation of minority religious groups.

Despite these critical studies, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the interplay between language, power, and identity in English language textbooks in Pakistan. While much has been written about the ideological content of Urdu and other regional language textbooks, there has been relatively less focus on how English textbooks contribute to the construction of national and religious identities. This study aims to fill this gap by using CDA to examine how English is used in textbooks to promote nationalism, reinforce religious identities, and marginalise linguistic and cultural diversity. By analysing the ideological messages embedded in these textbooks, this research will explore how language and discourse in educational materials play a role in shaping students' understanding of power, identity, and belonging in the Pakistani context. Furthermore, it will investigate how these

textbooks contribute to the broader discourse on globalisation, modernity, and the role of English in a postcolonial society.

Through this critical engagement, the study seeks to uncover the hidden ideologies that shape English language teaching in Pakistan and to offer insights into how textbooks can be reimagined to promote a more inclusive, diverse, and socially just educational system.

3. Methodology

The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary methodological framework. CDA is a qualitative research approach that focuses on the relationship between language and power. It is used to analyse how language in texts reflects, reproduces, and challenges social ideologies. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of CDA is used to analyse the English language textbooks, which involves examining three key levels: the textual level (microanalysis), the discursive practice level (production and consumption), and the social practice level (macroanalysis).

3.1 Textual Analysis

The first step in the analysis is to conduct a close reading of selected English language textbooks used in Pakistani schools. Textbooks from both the 2010 and 2016 series are analysed to identify recurring linguistic and discursive patterns, including lexical choices, metaphors, grammatical structures, and representations of characters. The analysis focuses on identifying how these linguistic features reflect and reinforce broader ideological themes, such as nationalism, religion, gender roles, and globalisation.

3.2 Discourse Practice

The second level of analysis involves examining the production and consumption of the textbooks. This includes investigating how these textbooks are created (i.e., by the Pakistan Textbook Board or other educational bodies) and the pedagogical practices through which they are used in the classroom. This step also considers the socio-political context in which these textbooks are produced, focusing on how national educational policies, language policies, and religious values shape the content of the textbooks.

3.3 Social Practice

The final level of analysis explores how the discourses present in the textbooks relate to broader social practices and ideologies in Pakistani society. This includes considering how the textbooks reflect the national narrative of Pakistan as an Islamic state, the role of English in promoting globalisation, and the marginalisation of local languages and religious minorities. The study also examines how these discourses may influence students' perceptions of their own identities and their understanding of the world around them.

The analysis is conducted using qualitative methods, including content analysis and discourse analysis. Texts are selected based on their representation of key ideological themes, such as nationalism, religion, and globalisation. A coding system is developed to categorise different linguistic features and discursive patterns, allowing for systematic comparison across different textbooks and editions.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis reveals several key ideological themes embedded in the English textbooks used in Pakistani schools.

4.1 Nationalism and Religious Identity

Both the 2010 and 2016 editions of the English textbooks emphasise Pakistani nationalism and Islamic identity. Textbook content often highlights the importance of patriotism, national unity, and the sacrifices made for the creation of Pakistan. These themes are reinforced through the portrayal of historical figures and national heroes, who are depicted as embodying idealised Pakistani and Muslim values. The content frequently stresses the importance of religion, particularly Islam, in shaping Pakistani identity.

4.2 Globalisation and English

A notable shift between the 2010 and 2016 editions is the increasing focus on English as a global language of opportunity. In the newer editions, there is a stronger emphasis on the role of English in connecting Pakistan to the global economy and international markets. This reflects broader globalisation trends, where English is positioned as a key skill for success in the modern world.

4.3 Gender Roles

Gender roles in the textbooks are often traditional, with women being depicted in domestic or caregiving roles and men in positions of authority and leadership. Although there are occasional attempts to present women as more active participants in society, these representations are limited and often framed within traditional cultural norms.

4.4 Marginalisation of Minorities

Religious minorities, such as Hindus and Christians, are rarely represented in the textbooks, and when they are, it is often in a limited and stereotypical manner. The dominant focus on Islam and Islamic values reflects the national ideology of Pakistan as an Islamic state, marginalising the diverse religious and cultural identities that exist within the country.

5. Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for curriculum development, textbook design, and teacher training in Pakistan.

5.1 Curriculum Development

The dominance of religious and nationalistic ideologies in the textbooks suggests a need for curriculum reforms that promote greater diversity and inclusivity. Textbooks should better reflect the pluralistic nature of Pakistani society, incorporating diverse religious, linguistic, and cultural perspectives.

5.2 Textbook Design

Textbook publishers should consider the potential ideological impacts of the content they produce. It is crucial to design textbooks that promote critical thinking and reflect a broader range of identities and values. A more inclusive approach would not only help mitigate the marginalisation of minorities but also promote a more balanced and fair representation of gender and other social issues.

5.3 Teacher Training

Teachers should be trained to critically engage with the textbooks and recognise the ideological messages they convey. Teachers can play a crucial role in helping students develop critical thinking skills and challenge dominant ideologies, encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives and engage with diverse cultural and religious narratives.

6. Conclusion

The study provides a critical analysis of the ideological underpinnings of English language textbooks used in Pakistani schools. It reveals that these textbooks serve not only as language teaching tools but also as instruments for promoting nationalistic, religious, and globalisation-oriented discourses. While these textbooks help construct a cohesive national identity, they also marginalise linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity. The findings highlight the need for curriculum reforms, more inclusive textbook design, and teacher training to foster a more equitable and reflective educational environment. Future research could explore the effects of these textbooks on students' identities and their views on power, gender, and religion.

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