

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Language, Ideology and Education

The politics of textbooks in language education

Edited by
Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen and
Csilla Weninger

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First published 2015
by Routledge
Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Language, ideology and education : the politics of textbooks in language education / edited by Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen, Csilla Weninger.
Pages cm.—(Routledge research in language education)
1. English language—Study and teaching—Foreign speakers—Textbooks.
2. Language and languages—Study and teaching. 3. Multicultural education. I. Curdt-Christiansen, Xiao Lan.
PE1128.A2L2949 2015
418.0071—dc23
2014021743

ISBN: 978-0-415-84038-5 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-81422-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Times
by Swales & Willis, Exeter, Devon, UK

Language, Ideology and Education

This book examines the role textbooks play in the teaching of dominant and non-dominant (first and foreign) languages in a range of cultural contexts worldwide. Each chapter addresses important issues related to what constitutes 'legitimate knowledge', the politics of learning materials, global cultural awareness, competing ideologies and the development of multilingual literacies.

Language, Ideology and Education: The politics of textbooks in language education comprehensively surveys theoretical perspectives and methodological issues in the critical examination of language textbooks. In particular, it looks at:

- The cultural politics of language textbooks in the era of globalization.
- The politics of instructional materials for English for young learners.
- Ideological tensions and contradictions in lower primary English teaching materials in Singapore.
- Creating a multilingual/multicultural space in Japanese EFL: A critical analysis of discursive practices within a new language education policy.

The book is primarily addressed to those who teach and research in the areas of foreign language education, TESOL, applied linguistics, language policy, critical pedagogy and textual cultures. Although the book is focused on textbook and materials analysis, rather than evaluation, most chapters discuss implications for curriculum design and materials development, and therefore will be relevant to scholars working in those fields.

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The *Routledge Research in Language Education* series provides a platform for established and emerging scholars to present their latest research and discuss key issues in Language Education. This series welcomes books on all areas of language teaching and learning, including but not limited to language education policy and politics, multilingualism, literacy, L1, L2 or foreign language acquisition, curriculum, classroom practice, pedagogy, teaching materials, and language teacher education and development. Books in the series are not limited to the discussion of the teaching and learning of English only. Books in the series include:

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Series editor's foreword

Textbooks have been the cornerstone of education, socialization, and knowledge transmission and construction for millennia in literate cultures, though sometimes restricted to a privileged subset of the population based on gender, social class, and other categories and conventions. As the authors in this impressive and timely volume demonstrate so cogently, in the modern era with education much more widely available for the masses, textbooks continue to serve a variety of interests and purposes (political, nationalistic, religious, cultural and social), beyond simply “educating” students about (and often *in*) another language. Textbooks constitute a form of social, ideological and intellectual *control* as well as a source of potential *opportunities* for personal enrichment, development and imagination. Control is exerted not just by teachers over students by means of textbooks; what teachers themselves can do in classrooms (and, in some cases, what they can know and say about the language and culture they are teaching) is also controlled by publishers, educational authorities and others who wield influence over such matters. Textbooks typically aim to give students a sense of control over a subject (e.g., language and culture), albeit a carefully selected and constructed, even fabricated, language and culture. Indeed, far too often, textbook and curricular content is sanitized and idealized, omitting references to hardships, strife, socially marginalized ethnic minorities (whether as speakers or learners of the language) and debates, or other content that may be highly relevant to learners.

Economic interests on the part of authors and publishers in language education are also very apparent in the current neoliberal climate, particularly in the growing number of schools and postsecondary institutions in which English is taught in both anglophone and non-anglophone contexts. Economic and market considerations thus factor prominently into what is included in textbooks, how sophisticated the images and other media can be, and the intended readers’ (i.e., consumers’) and institutions’ appetite or tolerance for certain content and their ability to pay for expensive formats, including new digital modes and resources.

Furthermore, decentralization of control over the production of textbooks in some countries (e.g., China) in which government publishers previously had total control has meant that market forces, competition and personal connections locally and internationally may yield lucrative contracts for textbook authors and

substantial profits for publishers as well. Such factors, as chapter contributors in this volume note, have obvious consequences for the cultural content and orientation of language textbooks and for the rising cost of education for those required to purchase the books.

Yet despite the existence of seemingly unlimited resources now available on the Internet, textbooks have maintained their privileged position in most language curricula and other subject areas as the primary textual material available for instruction. Indeed, they are often the *de facto* curriculum, animated by instructors and students with varying degrees of enhancement, adaptation, or extension. Fundamentally *ideological* considerations related to the authoring, design, production, marketing, use and impact of language textbooks have received far too little critical examination, however. Although great strides have been made in interdisciplinary research and pedagogy related to critical media literacies, less attention has been paid to critical analyses of language textbooks, an educational staple. Analysis of this all-too-familiar textual genre as it is instantiated diachronically, synchronically, cross-linguistically and internationally yields many new insights about the foundations and purposes of language education, the semiotic tools and media used to achieve it, and the motives driving key decisions about content. In many contexts, language courses—and thus textbooks—are a mandatory part of the curriculum. Closer scrutiny is thus needed of the power and purposes of textbooks and of those who produce, commission, approve and adopt them, and on the basis of which learners co-construct their understandings of language, culture, themselves and the world. The positioning and representation of subjects *in* textbooks and of those subject *to* them warrant research and reflection by applied linguists and language educators as well as the learners themselves. Whose languages or language varieties, cultures, images and voices, knowledges and interests are included? Whose are not? Why not? What might the consequences of such omissions be? How do such forms of representation and positioning contribute to the formation of learners' own identities, practices, desires and ideologies, as well as their appreciation of the complex worlds—and words—of others? What contradictions or issues emerge?

This volume sets out to answer these and many other questions and thus represents an important, original collection of studies on language textbooks. In doing so, it covers a wide variety of target languages (Chinese, English, Arabic, Spanish and Hebrew) used in the disparate educational contexts of the authors—in the Americas, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and beyond. Vexing questions and concerns, such as those posed above, are examined against the backdrop of the new transnational, multilingual, digitally mediated realities and sensibilities of language teachers and learners, whether in Colombia, Greece, Israel, Singapore, or the United States. Included in the volume are analyses of textbooks both for the teaching of a (or the) locally dominant societal language (e.g., Hebrew in Israel) and for the teaching of languages associated more powerfully or iconically with other countries (e.g., English textbooks in China, Colombia, Greece and Japan, as well as Spanish textbooks in the US, and Chinese language textbooks exported to various parts of the world).

The authors underscore the political and ideological relationships among the languages that students already know and those they are learning, which often reflect tensions between local and global pressures and perceived—and often very real—differences in power and prestige among languages, cultures and ethnolinguistic identities. Notions of citizenship (of one's own country vs. as global citizens, cosmopolitans, good stewards of the environment) and self-efficacy (e.g., the "can do" spirit) inculcated in the texts are explored and interrogated by authors as well. The apparent goals of the textbooks, as "roadmaps" or instruments of dutiful workplace preparation, of exciting tourism, or assimilationist citizenship, for example, are viewed through various theoretical and methodological lenses (e.g., poststructuralist, criticalist, social semiotic) and also in light of the history and purposes of language education over the past century. Discourses of linguistic or cultural *authenticity*, *essentialism* and *commodification* are invoked and critiqued, as are idealistic—sometimes spectacular, exotic (alien), Orientalist, or cartoonish—representations and stereotypes of cultures, climates, characters and communication gambits often taught in such materials. Patronizing, condescending and universalizing discourses found in textbooks are similarly critiqued, such as those that gloss over fundamental differences among speakers of a particular language or their agency to enact cultural norms different from those of the assumed majority. Presumably the textbook creators aim to romanticize particular linguistic and cultural ideals into which they aim to socialize newcomers or learners, on the one hand, and avoid delicate, controversial points within a particular region, on the other. Quantitative and qualitative methods for analyzing language textbooks are explored and illustrated, ranging from content analysis, to critical discourse analysis, multimodal and functional linguistic analysis, and other forms of semiotic and intertextual analysis. The role and affordances of computerized corpus-based methods of analyzing texts are demonstrated in several chapters as well.

The volume offers an informative and provocative contribution to the field of applied linguistics by presenting critical new directions and methods for conducting research on textbooks in language education. It should be required reading for those setting out to write or select language textbooks for their own instructional purposes, as well as for those conducting research on textbooks currently or previously in use.

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Introduction

Ideology and the politics of language textbooks

*Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen and
Csilla Weninger*

Textbooks supported by various teaching resources constitute the material basis for teaching and learning in classrooms worldwide. As sociocultural materials, they are the products of complex selective processes reflecting political decisions, educational beliefs and priorities, cultural realities and language policies. As such, language teaching and learning are not ideologically neutral practices; they are located within complex webs of political and historical contexts and sociolinguistic practices, all of which is mediated through the textual and visual worlds of textbooks. Taking the above as its central assumption, this book critically examines the role textbooks play in the teaching of dominant and non-dominant (first and foreign) languages in a range of cultural contexts worldwide, to illustrate how cultural and social knowledge, historical perspectives and political ideologies are embedded in the textbooks. The central argument of this book is that learning a language, whether dominant or non-dominant, is an ideological engagement; representations and ways of being made available to learners are profoundly influenced by issues of economic accessibility, as well as dominant sociocultural, political and pedagogical paradigms, which in turn position learners *vis-à-vis* the worlds they encounter through these languages. Therefore the process of becoming a “proficient” language user entails a process of “ideological becoming” (Bakhtin, 1981) where individuals construct their identity partly through available discourses presented in authoritative textbooks and cultural encounters.

Why language, ideology and education?

Throughout much of the last sixty years, policy makers, language professionals and linguists have viewed language as a formal system and a neutral medium of communication that *reflects* the social world. Up until recently, such “objectivity” and indifference to the ideological nature of language certainly characterized mainstream linguistics and sociolinguistics (see Alim, 2005), the field of English for specific purposes (see Pennycook, 1997; Belcher, 2006), the broader academic and professional field of first and second language education (see Benesh 1993; Fairclough, 1999) as well as language policy (Ortega, 1999; Tollefson, 1991).

In the last fifteen years, however, we have seen sustained efforts to bring to the fore of academic discussions how language is inextricably linked to power: the power to position and to represent, to exclude and to silence; in short, the power to reproduce or alter the political, economic and cultural status quo. Critical pedagogies to language education have been advocated and implemented (e.g., Janks, 1999, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Kubota & Lin, 2009), and a critical orientation within the above academic fields has become mainstream.

These developments are testimony to the important recognition that language by no means simply reflects existing social relations; it takes an active part in shaping them. This dialectic between language or discourse and the social world underlies all critical approaches to language education. It is therefore the language educator or language professional's responsibility to turn learners' attention to the sociopolitical embeddedness of texts; to the fact that texts are not neutral transmitters of information but an assembly of semiotic resources that have come to be through a process of selection and are therefore ideologically implicated. Equally important is that texts position readers/viewers through preferred readings; therefore critical literacy entails reading with as well as against texts (Janks, 2010). Increasingly, there is also awareness that (foreign/second) language education should aim not simply at producing linguistically competent users who are capable of "culturally appropriate" behavior. With the impervious penetration of neoliberal, pragmatist discourses into education on the one hand, and the increasingly globalized reverberation and impact of problems with local origins, such as environmental pollution, migration and economic inequality on the other hand, comes the need for a language education that fosters critical stances towards discourses and their material bases (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Byram, 2008, 2011).

The contributors in this volume examine language textbooks and teaching materials precisely for their power to represent and position, and link them to their circumstances of production within particular sociocultural locales. The analyses address the following key questions:

- What ideological agendas (political/policy, state, cultural, pedagogic and economic) are promoted through the conception, design, dissemination and use of materials in these language contexts? In particular,
- Whose culture(s) is/are represented or disregarded in these materials? How does cultural representation facilitate or constrain learner positioning and identity? More fundamentally, how is culture conceived in textbooks?
- What kinds of pedagogies and educational goals are promoted through language teaching materials in diverse contexts?
- How are dominant/non-dominant languages perceived and valued in these political-linguistic contexts in relation to the national language and language education policies?
- What alternative worlds, identities and pedagogies might we envision for language education? What might a socioculturally sensitive and critically conscious process of assembling teaching materials entail?