Ideological messages embedded in an EFL textbook

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The purpose of this research is to reveal ideological messages in an English textbook for junior high school students in Japan through the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The textbook in question is *Columbus 21 English Course* (C21) (Togo et al., 2006), which was approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2005. In order to accomplish this purpose, my analysis focuses on the characters appearing in C21. The following major findings are discussed: the US-only orientation established by the characters and choice of subject matter, and the contrastive representation of Japanese and US culture. Finally, it is pointed out that these features in C21 might result in their legitimation as particular truth and knowledge in real classrooms. The possibility that the ideologies in the textbook can be challenged and resisted through classroom discursive practice is also explored.

本研究は日本の中学生用に作成されたある英語教科書のイデオロギー的メッセージをCritical Discourse Analysis (CDA)の手法を用いて明らかにすることを目的としている。分析対象は2005年に文部科学省から検定合格を受けた*Columbus 21 English Course* (C21) (東後他, 2006)である。この目的を遂行するために、C21の登場人物に焦点をあてた分析を試み、その後、「登場人物と題材選択によって確立されたアメリカ合衆国志向」と「日本文化と合衆国文化の対照的表象」という2つの特徴について議論する。最後に、C21における上述の志向や表象が実際の教室で特定の真実や知として正当化される危険性を指摘し、さらに、教室内言説実践を通じ、これらに挑戦し、抵抗することができるかもしれない可能性も探究する。

This research aims to reveal ideological messages embedded in an EFL textbook by using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). The textbook in question is *Columbus 21 English Course* (hereafter C21) (Togo, Ishikawa, Ota, Owada, Kanehara & Koizumi, 2006), which was approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2005, and is currently used at junior high schools in Japan.

There are two reasons for the selection of this research topic. The first is closely connected to my strong interest in the relationships between language, language education, power, and ideologies. Although they may be in the minority in the fields of TESOL and applied linguistics, various researchers have investigated the politics of language education, specifically that of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Canagarajah, 1999; Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Kramsch, 1993; Pennycook, 1994, 1998, 2001; Phillipson, 1992; Reagan, 2006; Tollefson, 1991, 2000). It is true that there are some differences in the details of their research, but they are in accordance with one another in the view that language education or ELT can act as a powerful conveyor of particular ideologies, thus reproducing social inequalities. Regarding language education in general, for

example, Clark and Ivanič (1997) point out that "[s]chooling is not ideology-free, and language and language/literacy education is, in our view, the prime carrier of the dominant ideologies and cultural values..." (p. 49).

It has also been maintained that textbooks used in education play a crucial role, not only in reflecting, but also in reproducing the social relations of power that exist outside classrooms (Blaut, 1993; Dendrinos, 1992; Gray, 2001; Luke, de Castell & Luke, 1989). According to Dendrinos (1992), textbooks "constitute an authorized medium that conveys to pupils 'legitimate' knowledge" (p. 26), serving "the social reproduction of cultural domination" (p. 154). These arguments as to the politics of both language education and textbooks suggest that close investigation of language textbooks helps uncover the ideological messages that are conveyed in them and the ways in which students are oriented by textbooks.

The second reason is related to my job as an editor of another approved English textbook, the *New Crown English Series* (hereafter NC) (Takahashi, Hardy, Negishi, Hidai, Mikami & Morizumi, 2006). In addition to working as a teacher at a secondary school in Japan, I have been a member of the editorial committee for this textbook since 1998. Although this research focuses on C21 for reasons mentioned below, critically analyzing one of the six approved English textbooks used at junior high schools in Japan has provided me with the opportunity to reflect upon my role as an editor as well as a teacher. This point is essential because, as Pennycook (2001) stresses, "critical work should always be self-reflexive" (p. 1). At the same time, I hope that this research will help others write English textbooks that challenge existing hegemonic ideologies, thus ultimately contributing to the field of ELT in Japan.

I will conclude this section by describing the reasons for which I have selected C21 in this research. This has to do with the use of the name *Columbus*. According to a telephone interview with the C21 editorial team conducted by Nakamura (2004), there were two reasons for naming this series *Columbus*. The first is that they thought the name would be easy to remember; the second is that they desired to create an image of departure for the 21st century by applying the former voyager's name, Christopher Columbus, to their English textbook. Christopher Columbus, on the one hand, is widely known as the first European that arrived in the Americas; on the other hand, his voyage to the continents has been receiving more and more critical attention from the perspective of the history of European colonization. Considering the two reasons provided by the series editors, they seem to be indifferent to the social, political and cultural implications of Columbus's voyage in world history (Nakamura, 2004). C21's relatively apolitical view of history motivated me to carefully examine the contents themselves.

Focus of analysis

As mentioned in the previous section, the purpose of this research is to reveal ideological messages embedded in C21. In order to accomplish this purpose, my analysis focuses on the characters appearing in C21.

All of the six approved English textbooks for junior high school students in Japan, including C21, have multiple fictitious characters, who are usually junior high school students. Every lesson in the textbooks is designed in the form of these characters' introducing a specific topic. It is also typical of approved English textbooks that the same fictitious characters appear throughout the three volumes, growing older as actual students do. In other words, junior high school students in Japan learn English with these fictitious "friends" for three years, which suggests that their existence may explicitly or implicitly influence the formation of students' particular viewpoints of the world. Thus, the characters in the textbooks can have profound effects, and analyzing the features of these characters in C21 helps reveal the social identities that it promotes.

In addition to fictitious characters, choice of subject matter (that is, the content of model conversations and topics that appear in conjunction with grammar and vocabulary) also plays an important role in textbooks. According to Nakamura (1993), who is a former lead author of NC, the decision as to what subject matter to deal with constitutes one of the most crucial phases of editing an English textbook. This is because messages are most directly reflected in subject matter. Dendrinos (1992) similarly argues that social values are conveyed by the topics in textbooks. Following Nakamura and Dendrinos, my analysis also refers in passing to subject matter.

Analytical framework

Messages in a text are artifacts of "the multiple social construction of meaning and knowledge" (Mertens, 1998, p. 11) and their complexity cannot be understood in the same way as phenomena in the natural sciences. This research, therefore, employs CDA as an analytical framework. According to Fairclough (1995), the aim of CDA is to denaturalize ideologies that have become naturalized. Making use of CDA suggests that my analysis is qualitative, thus inevitably relying on my own interpretation. As interpretation in ethnography is influenced by the ethnographer's experiences (Denscombe, 1999), analysis in CDA is also affected by the analyst's viewpoint. My analysis of C21 is one of multiple interpretations from "a certain standpoint" (Mertens, 1998, p. 11) and the findings cannot be independent of my personal experiences, beliefs and social values as an editor of another textbook as well as a teacher. This must be borne in mind throughout the following analysis and discussion.

Critical analysis of C21

The analysis here focuses on the characters in C21. The findings will be discussed in terms of the characters' (1) nationality and (2) personality, while occasionally making reference to the topics that appear throughout the texts.

Nationality

C21 presents two main characters: a male student, Hiro, and a female student, Jenny. The main characters here are those who appear in almost every lesson throughout the three volumes of the textbook. Hiro is Japanese whereas Jenny is American. It is important to note that this inclusion of only Japanese and American nationalities among the main characters is also reinforced by the existence of supporting characters. In C21, there are seven supporting characters with speaking roles who often appear in the lessons from Book 1 to 3, although they do not play as large a role as Hiro and Jenny. Even if these supporting characters are taken into consideration, the limited variety of the nationalities represented in C21 does not change; all of the supporting characters come from Japan and the United States (see Table 1).

This US-only orientation in establishing the main and supporting characters is closely connected to the subject matter in C21, which also focuses on issues regarding Japan and the United States throughout the three volumes. Nearly 90% of the total regular lessons are somehow related to Japan and the United States, the most typical topics being holidays and traditional events. For example, Jenny participates in a Japanese summer festival wearing a *yukata* (an informal cotton kimono), spends the New Year holidays in Kyoto (a very "Japan-like" city) and experiences rice planting in the countryside. On the other hand, Hiro's family celebrates Halloween and Christmas with Jenny "American-style." Photographs depicting scenes from these holidays are also provided on the front cover of two volumes of the series. Furthermore, on one of the same covers, photographs are included that introduce other festivals in the United States such as Easter, Independence Day and Thanksgiving, although they are not dealt with as topics in the regular lessons.

Table 1. The features of the supporting characters in C21

Name	Relationship with Hiro and Jenny	Sex	Nationality
Mrs. Yamada	Hiro's mother	Female	Japanese
Sanae	Hiro's younger sister	Female	Japanese
Daisuke	Hiro's and Jenny's classmate	Male	Japanese
Kazu	Hiro's and Jenny's classmate	Male	Japanese
Yumi	Hiro's and Jenny's classmate	Female	Japanese
Mr. White	Jenny's grandfather	Male	American
Sarah	Jenny's best friend	Female	American

According to Matsuda's (2002a) analysis of seven English textbooks published in 1997, the key characters in those textbooks are, except for the Japanese ones, mostly from Inner Circle countries (that is, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland). She regards this Western orientation as problematic. The reason for this is that "[i]f students are exposed only to a limited section of the world, their awareness and understanding of the world may also become limited, too" (Matsuda, 2002b, p. 438). As for the main and supporting characters in C21, however, the orientation is not so much towards Western countries as towards the United States exclusively. This indicates that there is a great possibility that C21 supplies students with exposure to a more limited part of the world, which may also cause them to develop a more biased viewpoint.

As a result of this US-only orientation, even people from other countries in the so-called Inner Circle do not speak in C21, but rather are spoken about. Characters from these countries are seldom allowed to talk about themselves. One of the typical lessons, in which Hiro guides Jenny on her first day at school, is provided below:

Jenny: Who's that woman over there?

Hiro: That's Ms. Brown. She's an English teacher. Her class is fun.

Jenny: **Is she from America?**

Hiro: **No, she isn't.** She's from New Zealand. (Book 1, p. 29; emphasis added)

Although Ms. Brown, who is an English teacher from New Zealand, is talked about by Hiro and Jenny in this lesson, she herself has no opportunity to utter any words. In fact, not only in this lesson but also in all of the following regular lessons, is she never given the chance to talk about New Zealand or herself.

The question "Is she from America?" in the dialog also promotes the textbook's US-only orientation. What is more interesting and meaningful here, however, is to compare the extract with similar extracts from five other approved English textbooks, which are NC, *New Horizon English Course* (NH) (Kasajima, Asano, Shimomura, Makino, Ikeda & Akashi, 2006), *One World English Course* (OW) (Higuchi, Matsumoto, Takahashi, Okita, Kanamori & Kawasaki, 2006), *Sunshine English Course* (S) (Sano, Yamaoka, Matsumoto, Sato, Aoki & Shimaoka, 2006) and

Total English (T) (Horiguchi, Iwatsuki, Nihei, Amemiya, Ito & Oikawa, 2006). Like C21, all of these offer sample dialogs which demonstrate the ways in which an interrogative sentence with *be* should be made and answered. Three of these dialogs are provided below:

Aki: **Are you from America?**

Jim: **Yes, I am.**

Aki: Are you a basketball fan?

Jim: No, I'm not. I'm a baseball fan. I watch baseball on TV every day. (T, Book 1, p. 44; emphasis added)

Shin: Are you Ms. Green?

Ms. Green: Yes, I am.

Shin: I'm Shin.

Ms. Green: Nice to meet you, Shin.

Shin: Nice to meet you, too. **Are you from America?**

Ms. Green: **No, I'm not.** I'm from Canada. (NH, Book 1, pp. 12-13; emphasis added)

Aki: **Are you from America, Ms. King?**

Ms. King: **No, I'm not.** I'm from Canada.

Aki: Oh, are you?

Ms. King: Yes. From Toronto. (OW, Book 1, pp. 18-19; emphasis added)

The problem here is that America is favored and chosen frequently in the textbooks. Whether the United States is selected consciously or unconsciously, the inclusion of these questions in approved English textbooks, including C21, reflects the fact that in Japan "foreign country" is almost always equated with the United States (Nakamura, 1993). More importantly, given that textbooks are "written in order to be read aloud" (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 14) and to be "spoken by one or more, to one or more classroom participants" (Sunderland, Abdul Rahim, Cowley, Leontzakou & Shattuck, 2000, p. 253), this US-oriented discourse is simultaneously reproduced through classroom discursive practice. In fact, together with these dialogs, most of the English textbooks cited earlier have exercises which encourage students to practice by taking turns playing the roles of the characters. Such discursive practice helps the discourse become "naturalized" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 92) to the extent that the students might assume that "foreign country" refers almost exclusively to the United States (Nakamura, 1993). As Wodak (1996) argues that discourses are not only constituted by society and culture but also constitute them, language use in the English textbooks is also constitutive of society and culture.

Personality

The personality of each of the main characters is another feature that reveals ideologies. In C21, Hiro and Jenny appear to have contrastive personalities. Hiro is described as being passive and poor at self-expression whereas Jenny is active and good at self-expression. Moreover, while Hiro has a tendency to emphasize harmony, Jenny tends to fight for justice.

Such a contrast between the personalities of these characters is also promoted by the illustrations. In several lessons, Jenny is depicted as standing straight with a smiling face and with her arms open, giving the impression that she unabashedly expresses her ideas. On the other hand, Hiro is depicted as sitting down with a puzzled look and with his chin or head on his hand(s), conveying the impression that he does not like Jenny's behavior.

What is significant here is that the representation of contrastive personalities of the two main characters is very similar

to "the cultural dichotomization of the West versus the East" (Kubota, 1999, p. 15), which is often constructed in the fields of TESOL and applied linguistics. According to Kubota, researchers in these fields frequently label Japanese culture as "traditional, homogeneous, and group oriented with a strong emphasis on harmony" (p. 11) whereas they describe the US culture and Western culture in general by using such words as *"individualism*, *self-expression*, and *critical thinking"* (p. 12; emphasis in original). Pointing out that Japanese people themselves have also equally contributed to the production of their own cultural uniqueness, known as *nihonjinron*, Kubota criticizes these dichotomous representations of culture. This is because they are based on cultural determinism, which leads to a view of a culture not as "a dynamic organism" but as "a monolithic, fixed, neutral, or objective category" (p. 11). Pennycook (2001) similarly problematizes a binary construction of cultural difference such as this, stressing that "identities and differences are multiple, diverse, and interrelated" (p. 146). Furthermore, he points out that such a construction of cultural difference needs to be opposed because this has to do with the construction of "the Other" which "is tied to a history of colonial and racist relations" (p. 146).

Referring to Foucault (1978), who suggests that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (p. 100), Kubota (1999) also argues that cultural dichotomies are constructed by discourses. Taking this argument into account, it can be said that contrasting Japanese and American personalities in an English textbook contributes to constructing and reproducing dichotomous labeling which reinforces "the Othering, stereotyping, misrepresenting, and essentializing" (p. 15) of both cultures. At the same time, such cultural labeling in C21 may result in its legitimation as particular truth and knowledge through classroom discursive practice, encouraging students to regard these labels as natural.

Finally, another feature of Hiro's and Jenny's personalities has to do with the ways in which they are represented as growing over time. As the series progresses, Hiro gradually becomes more active and expressive by living with and learning from Jenny. The following scene, in which Hiro and Jenny are in the bus, shows part of his growth:

Jenny: Look at that man. He's taking up two seats. Unbelievable!

Hiro: Yes, but he looks really mean.

Jenny: And look. There's a woman with a baby. Someone should tell him to move over.

Hiro: Not me.

Jenny: OK, then I will. He's so selfish.

Hiro: All right. All right. I'll talk to him.

(Later)

Jenny: Thank you, Hiro. I knew you could do it.

Hiro: Oh, stop it! My heart is still pounding.

Jenny: Is it?

Hiro: Yes, and I was really nervous.

Jenny: But you talked to him. That's great.

Hiro: I didn't feel confident at all, though.

Jenny: Well, you did the right thing, Hiro. I'm proud of you.

Hiro: Thanks. (Book 3, pp. 7-8)

In this scene, Hiro, who is usually not good at expressing himself, manages under Jenny's influence to talk to a young man who has no manners. However, it is interesting to note that, despite Hiro's growth, there are no descriptions concerning Jenny's change in C21. Throughout the three volumes, Hiro almost always plays the role of learning something from Jenny, particularly a so-called Western way of thinking, and gradually changes into being active and expressive. Jenny, on the other

hand, does not learn anything special from Hiro and is almost always in a position of advising, admonishing, encouraging and reasoning with him on the basis of her own cultural values. Although both Hiro and Jenny are in the same year of junior high school, their relations of power appear to be unbalanced. Specifically, Jenny is described as if she were a teacher for Hiro. According to Kubota (1998), in Japan there is "the discourse which regards English and Anglo-speakers of English as developed, civilized, and superior" (p. 303). It seems that the descriptions of Hiro and Jenny's unbalanced relationship in C21 not only reflect but also reproduce that discourse.

Implications

As mentioned above, the discourses and cultural dichotomies in C21 might result in their legitimation as particular truth and knowledge in real classrooms. At the same time, however, there is the possibility that these discourses and cultural dichotomies could be challenged and resisted by teachers' questioning them and providing their students with the opportunity to criticize them. According to Sunderland (1994), "[t]he most non-sexist textbook can become sexist in the hands of a teacher with sexist attitudes" (p. 64 in Sunderland et al., 2000, p. 260). Conversely, "the most sexist" textbook can become "non-sexist" in the hands of a teacher with "non-sexist" attitudes. If this is taken into account, C21, which reproduces discourses of the United States and cultural differences between it and Japan, can be used in alternative ways. For example, if I were to use C21 at my school, I would make use of the variety that can be found in the classroom. I would ask my students whether they are all really passive and poor at self-expression "just because they are Japanese." This would help make them aware that some of them are Jenny-like "even if they are Japanese," which would encourage the realization that culture is not fixed but fluid.

Conclusion

This paper, by using CDA, has revealed C21's US-only orientation and dichotomous representation of Japanese and US culture. It was also pointed out that classroom discursive practice can either reproduce these features or challenge and resist them. Considering this, it can be said that research on a textbook is not sufficient without addressing the ways in which it is actually used in real classrooms. In brief, "[w]hat is done with a text is of equal importance" (Pennycook, 2007, p. 84). As the next step after critical analyses of a textbook, it is also important to explore teacher (or student) talk around the textbook. This would forward the project of challenge and resistance.

Bio data

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