



## Imperialism Ideology Represented in English Language Teaching Textbooks: A Literature Review

✉ Muhammad Fauzan

Submitted : 15 July 2022    Received: 31 December 2022    Published: 30 June 2023

### ABSTRACT

Recently, considerable literature has grown up around the theme of imperialism traced in society. This paper systematically reviews the data for imperialism instilled in English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks based on some studies, aiming to provide a reference for those who are concerned in the educational field, especially in English teaching-learning. Due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of the whole kinds of imperialism; it will merely focus on the linguistic and cultural imperialism found in textbooks. The main issues addressed in this paper are the implementation of imperialism in ELT textbooks taken from Asia, especially in Indonesia contexts which are then followed by the effects of imperialism itself and how teachers overcome the issue so that it does not become a serious threat to students who learn English using ELT textbooks. In the end, the author concludes that imperialism ideology is still embedded in various ELT textbooks in Asia including Indonesia.

Keywords: Cultural Imperialism, Ideology, Linguistic Imperialism, Textbooks

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, non-native speakers commonly use English as a foreign language to get various communicative needs. It can be seen in many countries where English has become a compulsory course that should be taught by the teacher in the teaching-learning process, including Indonesia. It is also supported by McKay (2004) who believes that there are many people who use English in modern society, and this number is always growing. This improvement is due to the advantages that English offers to those who use it, and these benefits support people who know and can use this language. The creation of English learning materials, particularly the textbook, should be considered in order to support this requirement. As Harsono (2017) states, well-designed textbooks can support teachers a lot, even inexperienced ones because they act as supplementary materials.

Since its valuable function in the learning process, the use of textbooks in the classroom is inevitable. According to Harmer (2007), by using textbooks during a teaching-learning process, students and teachers will get benefits, for example, they can look back from the previous discussions or continue to the next pages depending on what material they want to discuss that time. It can also make it easier for teachers to organize a particular learning material following a textbook so that the learning process can be measured and directed with one guideline. Parrish

#### How to Cite:

Fauzan, M. (2023). Imperialism Ideology Represented in English Language Teaching Textbooks: A Literature Review. *Jurnal Ilmiah Widya Borneo*, 6(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.56266/widyaborneo.v6i1.142>.

MTsN 2 Tanah Bumbu, Indonesia

✉ Corresponding author :

Satiung, Kec. Kusan Hilir, Kabupaten Tanah Bumbu, Kalimantan Selatan 72273

Email : [46muhammadfauzan@gmail.com](mailto:46muhammadfauzan@gmail.com)



(2004) also describes that the benefit of using a textbook may make the students gain their needs and expectations for having something specific to work as a source, or it can be brought home for further study. However, when selecting a textbook, teachers must take into account a variety of factors connected to the suitability for their students, including the textbook's content, design, and of course, its underlying ideologies.

Ideology itself cannot be separated from power intervention in its application; in this case, the ELT textbook is a tool for showing power. As Fowler (1991) states, the text reflects and expresses ideology. Therefore, based on the definition, whenever there is power produced, ideology is constructed. It is also applied to textbooks which Ahmad (2014) describes that the content of EFL/ESL textbooks influences the forming of students' perceptions of new cultures and social values. Therefore, a textbook is also considered a medium that brings the ideology to the target readers (Van Dijk, 1993), whether it is implicitly or explicitly conveyed. One of the most interesting ideologies to explore and reveal is imperialism.

According to Gudova (2019), in the modern world, imperialism can be understood as the dominant position of one territory (country, religion, culture) over another. In other words, it can be said as a superpower that dominates and influences other countries to control those who do not have equal power. In line with the definition, Münkler (2007) divides imperialism into four categories, namely military, political, economic, and cultural. He also adds that in the 21st century, the most common type of imperialism is cultural imperialism which includes linguistic, media, scientific, and educational imperialism (Münkler, 2007). We can observe an example of how cultural imperialism works by changing the way teenagers dressed which tends to follow the Western style. Another instance is the change of language style in social practice in which people tend to mix other languages with their native language for showing their intelligence and knowledge. Therefore, in this paper, the author will examine the cultural and linguistic imperialism in English language teaching textbooks.

Considering the serious effects coming from this issue, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the existence of linguistic and cultural imperialism implied in our society. Consequently, in this paper, the author attempts to defend his belief that ELT textbooks must be considered as one of the main media for spreading the ideology of imperialism, whether it is explicitly shown or implicitly conveyed. Furthermore, this paper is compiled to find out more about the hidden forms of imperialism in ELT textbooks by providing the basic terms about the issue that is being raised. Next, the term linguistic and cultural imperialism will be elaborated to give more understanding of the basic notion of imperialism itself. It is also supported by the basic term of ideology in textbooks and how hegemony works to give more understanding about this topic. Further, this paper will show that the ELT textbook can be used as a tool to convey the author's belief by providing a way to find the implementation of imperialism.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Ideology in Textbook**

Textbooks have been used in many areas as a source of study such as literature, education, politics, linguistics, and so forth. It refers to a part of a system that enforces a sense of responsibility, morality, and cultural coherence (Abdollahzadeh, 2018). As such, textbooks used by EFL classrooms can be considered a primary source of cultural and language information for those who are learning foreign languages. It is in line with Chris (1994) who defines it as "a book designed to provide an authoritative pedagogic version of an area of knowledge". However, Van Dijk (1993) believes that textbooks are ideologically embedded in the curriculum. Thus, the ideology inserted in the textbook can easily be accepted by readers considering that it is deemed, by many readers, as a more believable source than others.

The term ideology holds great significance in many textbooks, particularly those about education, as it serves as a platform for stakeholders to propagate their ideologies aligned with their interests. As Wodak (1989) also views that ideology as establishing and maintaining

unbalanced power relations, it can be perceived as values that strengthen the dominance of the more powerful over those who have less power. In the same way, it is also clearly stated by Fowler (1991) points out that language is never neutral, and it must be regarded as constructed “ideology” presented from a particular point of view. It promotes the understanding of both overt and covert ideologies. Therefore, a textbook as a discourse is not merely a disclosure of the knowledge and experience of the author articulated using logical language and proper grammatical rules, but also the use of language in textbooks can contain values and beliefs from the author as the individual who has power, including the ideology of imperialism.

Moreover, ideology cannot be also separated from the term hegemony in its application. It is also closely related to the theme that this paper wants to discuss in which we accept a particular ideology unconsciously and think that it is a normal situation. Hegemony itself is the term used by Gramsci (1992) to explain the process by which the power relation operated (Fitzgibbon, 2013). He also identifies hegemony as an important concept to understand how the dominant classes retain their interests. One powerful example of hegemony is the way mass media like advertisements used by the dominant group to persuade people to become their consumers. However, in this case, the author will focus on the use of ELT textbooks as a means of hegemony carrying knowledge, values, and perceptions of the author as the dominant group to influence reality.

### **Linguistic and Cultural Imperialism**

The term *imperialism* comes from the Latin *imperium* which means the domination and control for political, economic, cultural, or social purposes by military forces of others (Phillipson, 2008). The domination here will influence the less powerful side to be directed and controlled by the more powerful group based on the focus on the kinds of imperialism aspect. Imperialism is also different from colonialism, even though, they have similar meaning which tends to repress other countries. Based on Subrahmanyam (2011), colonialism is mostly associated with the process of physical contact forcibly in controlling other countries, while imperialism refers to the domination and expansion the authority through non-physical either formally or informally. Mubarak (2015) has divided imperialism based on their purposes, namely ancient imperialism and modern imperialism. However, this paper will focus only on the modern one that prioritizes domination of ideology, mentality, and psychology rather than conquering areas and natural resources.

Modern imperialism, which some experts call neo-imperialism, can achieve the goal through the media, advertising, or popular culture which in the previous it was associated with the military forces (Thompson, 1990; Phillipson, 2008; and Fitzgibbon, 2013). It can be understood as the concept of policies that cause unequal relationships. Moreover, it is unavoidable in its practice that imperialism also influences the language and culture of a particular targeted country. Fitzgibbon (2013) states, “Linguistic imperialism involves the transfer of a dominant language to other people by a significant structural system”. In this ideology, the inclination for one specific language over others has superiority and it results in speakers of the dominant language being privileged. This happens for reasons such as easier access to global which uses a particular language as a means of interaction and written and oral communication. In line with this, Phillipson (2008) argues that such practices of linguistic imperialism enable exploitation, inequality, and a hierarchy that leads to the process of privileging those who can use the dominant language. Linguistic imperialism embodies unequal rights and is hegemonic because it becomes internalized and adjusted as a normal and natural situation. It can be seen in Indonesia where English has hegemonic power to influence many aspects of our life considering it is deemed as the first foreign language that should be taught from junior high school. It is also strengthened by the assumption that English can improve individual social status (Mappiasse & Bin Sihes, 2014).

Furthermore, along with linguistics, cultural imperialism also needs to be explored more deeply in its use in ELT textbooks. According to Phillipson (1992), linguistic imperialism is a part of cultural imperialism which media, education, and science as the other components. Linguistic and cultural imperialism, in this case, English and its inner circle, discriminates the other languages which can be seen in the expansion of a particular culture through the dominations of their language considering that the status as lingua franca in daily international communication (Shin et al., 2011). Thus, since English is known as the international lingua franca, the use of ELT textbooks as material in education, especially in the outer and expanding circles, should represent not only be limited to the culture of native-English countries but also needs to cover the world in general. In the same way, Phillipson (1992) also reckons that “ELT reconstitutes cultural inequalities between English and other languages”. Therefore, in the process of unveiling this interesting issue, the author tries to examine how the ELT textbooks will affect shifting or changing the students’ linguistic and cultural ideology slowly but surely.

## DISCUSSION

### Imperialism Implemented in ELT Textbooks

It is important to acknowledge that the process of producing textbooks is socially constructed and motivated. Since it is created in a particular social context, the knowledge and cultural representation embedded within the textbook cannot be viewed as neutral but represents the interests of certain individuals, groups, or institutions. This can be used as a means to broaden the understanding of specific cultures through textbooks, especially those which are used for English language teaching. Most of them do not provide equal descriptions of the culture and merely describe their own cultures, in this case, the countries in the inner circle. Hence, it is not surprising if Phillipson (1992) emphasizes that in the promotion of ELT, there is the ideology of linguistic and cultural imperialism included. It can be interpreted that the new form of colonialism might be performed through ELT considering that English is a dominant language used internationally. It is also deemed as a world language instead of an inner circle language (McKay, 2004). Thus, the ELT textbooks should not expose only Western cultures; it needs to globalize the material by providing an equal depiction of cultural representation from other countries in their materials, especially textbooks to be exported for educational purposes.

The imbalance of cultural representations in ELT textbooks can be seen in the results of research conducted by Khodadady and Shayesteh (2016) who examined linguistic and cultural imperialism in three textbooks, namely *World English*, *Top Notch*, and *American English File* considering that they are taught extensively in Iran. They found in *Top Notch* and *American English File* that the inner circle countries, including USA and UK, are still portrayed beyond the countries from the expanding circle in their cultural representation even though the textbooks are targeted to the whole language learners in the world. However, on the other side, they got different findings in *World English* in which the culture of native and non-native countries can be better equally represented than the others. Moreover, the cultural imperialism found in those textbooks is in the form of reading passages that mostly narrate the settings taken from a place in the USA and UK. It is not only analyzed based on the number of passages contained but also the themes they conveyed in the textbooks whether they are related to inner circle or expanding circle countries.

In addition, Prof & Baleghizadeh (2012) also highlighted linguistic imperialism in the *American English File* textbooks in their research. They found an imbalance availability in the amount of exposure recorded-audio from non-native varieties in practicing pronunciation and accents compared with the native ones. They asserted in that study, that inequality representation affects the accent or dialects that will be followed by the language learners. It indicates the reluctance of the author to expose language learners to using varieties of English from non-native speakers even if they are fluent in English. Therefore, it is hegemony when language learners are directed to believe that a native accent is a goal of success in learning English. In

this case, Baleghizadeh and Saharkhiz (2012) defined that “linguistic imperialism is to infuse others with the idea that native English is the best variety to absorb”.

In the Indonesian context, imperialism has been also identified in ELT textbooks entitled *Real English 2* and *Real English 3* which are intended for grades XI and XII. Budairi (2019) conducted the study to examine the exercise of dominant discourse, in this case, linguistic and cultural imperialism, in those two textbooks. The result of his analysis showed that there are imbalanced power relations performed in two ways, topics, and visuals. After compiling the topics from each chapter, besides the small representation of Indonesia compared to inner-circle countries, it was also found different illustrations given by the author in describing both of them through the topics. The author described inner circle countries by providing the positive aspects; while on the other hand, the topics related to Indonesia were not portrayed as positive as others. Indonesia was often associated with the topics of natural disasters or crime happening in big cities such as *an earthquake in Jakarta* and *ATM fraud experience*. In the same way, the images or visuals provided in the textbooks also tended to show the bleaker side of Indonesia rather than images of Britain which were portrayed more positively. Two contrasting pictures used in the textbooks illustrate the winter in Northern Europe where people enjoy ice skating and the rainy season in Southeast Asia where floodwaters inundated houses. It is hard to say that the juxtaposition is merely the illustration of text without any hidden agenda within the text books.

### **The Effects of Imperialism**

The issue of linguistic and cultural imperialism cannot be perceived as a normal phenomenon in our society. This might be a serious problem if our language and culture slowly begin to change. Continuously exposing the positive side of inner circle countries in ELT textbooks or stressing the accent and dialect of native speakers indirectly shapes the ideology of language learners. One of the effects that can be attributed to imperialism in linguistics is the use of other languages in the communication process, either in formal or colloquial situations. It is important to underline that the use of English and Bahasa Indonesia in communication has been popular in society. Changing some phrases or words to English will make the speakers feel more educated and prestigious. It is by Pradana (2020) clearly states that “English is perceived as a symbol of pride and prestige among certain Indonesian circles”. His observation aligns with the notion that language can carry social and cultural significance, and the perception of English as a prestigious language may have implications for language learning, education, and social dynamic within Indonesia. Therefore, although it has been becoming a trend, it does not mean that the use of English in daily communication is merely about the easiness of conveying something, but it is a form of the colonized mind. This phenomenon indicates the identity crisis among the speakers, although they do not consciously view this as a serious problem. Therefore, the term hegemony is appropriate to use in such situations.

In viewing the arbitrary use of English mingling with other languages in social interaction, Dorjee (2006) has divided it into two reasons: prestige and need-filling. As already mentioned, the amount of exposure to the positive side of cultures from inner-circle countries will also affect the way people view the particular country. It may build a sense of pride to be part of the country by following their style, eating habits, and way of speaking. Hence, it is deniable to say that ‘prestige’ is one reason behind the borrowing of English words in daily speaking. On another side, the need-filing motive can be also considered when the native language has no adequate word to use in some particular contexts that are commonly found in an academic situation. However, as long as there are still words available that can be used in the native language, the reason for need-filling is not acceptable in this case. This phenomenon can be seen when Indonesian tend to use the word ‘*meeting*’ instead of ‘*rapat*’, or the word ‘*newbie*’ rather than ‘*pendatang baru*’ in colloquial situations. This is not only a matter of code-switching or the assimilation process in a language but more than that the hegemony of imperialism

is working unconsciously. Although we know that the word imperialism is associated with territory colonialism, nowadays the new form of imperialism still gives some serious problems, one of which is related to linguistics and culture.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, linguistic and cultural imperialism can still be found in various ELT textbooks in Asia including Indonesia. Imperialism itself is represented in many ways depending on how the author designs the textbooks. It can be in the form of text showing the number of imbalanced representation topics of a particular culture. In another way, inequality is also found in depicting two different images as the representation of inner circle countries and expanding circle countries. Furthermore, although it does not change the culture and language style directly at that time, the effect of imperialism cannot be deemed as normal situations. Language learners unconsciously are directed to follow the value of inner circle countries and are proud to be a part of them. Therefore, since the imperialism in ELT textbooks has been seriously considered, teachers need extra attention to provide the appropriate material for their students. As a solution for this issue, the author proposes two ways teachers can select textbooks as their material in English language teaching. Firstly, teachers should act as an ideological filter for their students. It is required for teachers to understand well the content of the prospective textbooks that will be used. The cultural bias represented within the material either in the form of text or picture should be carefully analyzed before deciding which one of the textbooks they are going to have in their classroom. It needs to be highlighted that every textbook has its value or ideology. As a result, teachers should carefully select the explicit or implicit ideologies and values that are included in textbooks that will be distributed to the students. Moreover, the second way to overcome this issue is by familiarizing the students to think critically. This can be an alternative when there is no free-bias textbook available found. To prepare students for the diversity they will encounter during the teaching-learning process of English, teachers may begin the class by discussing multiculturalism and intercultural understanding with the class. One thing that should be underlined is the focus of this process to ensure that linguistic and cultural imperialism embedded in their textbooks will not give a big impact on students' beliefs and ideologies. Therefore, the critical thinking ability of students is expected to protect them from the influence of the dominant culture from inner-circle countries. Furthermore, while this study offers valuable perspectives on the concept of imperialism ideology within ELT textbooks, it is crucial to recognize its inherent limitations. Firstly, the sample size used in the study was relatively small, which could potentially restrict the applicability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the study solely concentrates on the examination of cultural and linguistic imperialism within the Asian context. Therefore, it is recommended that future research endeavors encompass a more extensive exploration, particularly in other expanding circle countries. By enhancing our knowledge of the topic, we will be better able to comprehend the imperialism ideology found in ELT textbooks. Lastly, to further deepen and expand our knowledge in this area, further research could explore this topic through comparative analysis. Researchers can conduct a comparative analysis of ELT textbooks from different regions or countries to identify variations in the representation of linguistic and cultural content. This analysis would clarify the impact of particular cultural contexts and the potential existence of localized imperialism.

## REFERENCES

- Abdollahzadeh, E. (2018). Ideologies in the Imported English Textbooks: EFL Learners and Teachers' Awareness and Attitude. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 2(217), 12–23.

- Ahmad, H. (2014). EFL Textbooks: Exploring the Suitability of Textbook Contents from EFL Teachers' Perspective. *VFAST Transactions on Education and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 12–20.
- Baleghizadeh, S., & Saharkhiz, A (2012). Linguistic Imperialism and EFL Textbooks: The Case of American English file. *E-International Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), 36-49.
- Budairi, A. (2019). Traces of Linguistic Imperialism Enacted Through Discursive Strategies in ELT Textbooks in Indonesia. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 1(2), 49. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v1i2.581>.
- Chris, C. (1994). Paradigms Regained: Towards a Historical Sociology of the Textbook. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 26(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027940260101>.
- Dorjee, K. (2006). Cultural Imperialism and Linguistic Change: Impact of Cultural Imperialism on Dzongkha Borrowing. *Media and Public Culture: Proceedings of the Second International Seminar on Bhutan Studies*, 121–137.
- Fitzgibbon, L. A. (2013). Ideologies and Power Relations in a Global Commercial English Language Textbook Used in South Korean Universities: A Critical Image Analysis and A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Dissertation*. The University of Queensland.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. Routledge.
- Gudova, I. (2019). Scientific Imperialism in the Global Educational Space. *Proceedings of Intcess 2019- 6th International Conference on Education and Social Sciences (INTCESS)*, 155–156.
- Gramsci, A. (1992). *Prison Notebooks: Volume I (J. A. Buttigieg, Trans.)*. Columbia University Press
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th Edition.). Pearson Education.
- Harsono, Y. M. (2017). Designing and Developing Appropriate EFL Learning Materials Reflecting New Contexts and Goals. *Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar on English Language and Teaching*, 350-354.
- Khodadady, E., & Shayesteh, S. (2016). Cultural and Linguistic Imperialism and the EIL Movement: Evidence From a Textbook Analysis. *Issues in Educational Research*, 26(4), 604–622.
- Mappiasse, S. S., & Bin Sihes, A. J. (2014). Evaluation of English as a Foreign Language and Its Curriculum in Indonesia: A Review. *English Language Teaching*, 7(10), 113–122. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v7n10p113>.
- McKay, S. L. (2004). Teaching English as an International Language: The Role of Culture in Asian Contexts. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 1(1), 1–22.
- Mubarok, S. M. A. (2015). Japanese Culture Imperialism Surabaya : Studi Kasus Dominasi Media Anime Jepang Komunitas Forever For Friend (FFF) Surabaya. *Thesis*. UIN Sunan Ampel.
- Münkler, H. (2007). *Empires: The Logic of World Domination from Ancient Rome to the United States*. Polity Press.
- Parrish, B. (2004). *Teaching Adult ESL: A Practical Introduction*. Cambridge University Press
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford University Press.

- Phillipson, R. (1997). Realities and Myths of Linguistic Imperialism. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 18(3), 238–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434639708666317>.
- Phillipson, R. (2008). The Linguistic Imperialism of Neoliberal Empire 1. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 5(1), 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427580701696886>.
- Pradana, B. (2020). Language and Cultural Imperialism: Indonesian Case. *International Journal on Language, Research and Education Studies*, 4(2), 209–222.
- Shin, J., Eslami, Z. R., & Chen, W. C. (2011). Presentation of Local and International Culture in Current International English-Language Teaching Textbooks. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 24(3), 253–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2011.614694>.
- Subrahmanyam, G. (2011). *Imperialism*. Sage Publication.
- Thompson, J. B. (1990). Ideology and Modern Culture. *Polity Press*.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006>.
- Wodak, R. (1989). *Language, Power, and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse*. John Benjamins.