

# Evaluating ESL Textbooks for Functional and Sociocultural Lessons of Literacy

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## Abstract

ESL researchers (Case et al., 2005; Sidek, 2002) have highlighted a neglect in the field to examine ESL textbooks for lessons about literacy (while literacy researchers (Cole, 2005; \*anne%an + Scarino, 2001), mostly note that these textbooks contain little to examine. In all these areas in the literature, this article recognizes the importance of definitions of literacy in language acquisition research and enters an in-depth analysis of three ESL reading (writing) textbooks, one each at a beginning, middle, and high level, and from publishers across Canada,

the (ritten %essa"es that s' rro' nd the%: (= arner + C' , ' y, 20 4, , . @!. As s' ch, this article analyzes te\$t&ooks< %essa"es re"ardin" acade%ic literacy skills and socioc' lt' ral ideolo"ies of literacy.

. o a st' dent, a te\$t&ook %ay see% strai"htfor (ard. . he s, eci#c te\$t is often %andated &y a teacher, and the st' dent st' dies that te\$t (itho' t %' ch /' estion. = hile, to this st' dent, there is only one te\$t&ook, the reality is that the teacher had a lar"e %arket, lace fro% (hich to select the te\$t. . eachers, or often, their de, art%ents, choose te\$t&ooks &ased on certain /' alities, like their ali"n%ent (ith the c' rric' l' %, ' ser friendliness, and tar"eted skills (= en0Chen" et al., 20 !. \* o( ever, even the %ost caref' lly c' rated te\$t&ooks are i%&' ed (ith %eanin"s for%ed &y a' thors and , ' &lishers that sha, e the ' ser-s conce, t' alization of the , resented %aterial. . ho%, son (20 F! descri&es the str' ""les of , rod' cin" a lan"" a"e te\$t&ook&

= ritin" forei"n lan"" a"e te\$t&ooks re/' ires dif#c' lt choices a&o' t the re, resentation of lan"" a"e ' sers and their c' lt' res, , artic' larly for lan"" a"es that are s, oken in hi" hly co%, le\$, constantly chan" in", even contentio' s %' ltilin"" a Et^are

More closely (with this traditional definition and they describe them as theories that treat literacy as a decontextualized and decontextualizing technology: (L. FF@! . They instead, offer a more contextualized social practice, paradigm. Similarly, the Lee (London Journal, (1977-!) calls for an extension of the idea and scope of literacy, ideally to account for the context of oral culture rally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies: (L. - ! and move beyond list looking at reading and writing. In a language learning situation, however, reading and writing are essential to ensure that learners cannot broaden and deepen their literacy knowledge and experiences if they do not learn how to read and write. Consequently, when discussing literacy, ideally for language learners, we must include a multifaceted explanation of literacy, from both functional and sociocultural perspectives.

First, functional literacy is defined as the ability to employ basic reading or writing skills: (Dorothy, 1976, . . . . Ferris (2005) explains that there are several challenges learners encounter when coming (with literacy demands) little extensive reading experience in English makes reading difficult; limited experience in writing in English makes writing difficult; there is a lack of native intuition in the target language; limited vocabulary makes reading and writing challenging; and a lack of cultural and rhetorical knowledge can make connecting (with the audience difficult. Ferris (2005) argues that even basic functional literacy skills can be challenging to acquire.

Consequently, such challenges, basic functional literacy for low-level learners should not be decontextualized. Even basic literacy skills are entrenched in the values of, power, citizenship, and democracy (Miera, 2001) and many scholars affirm the relationship between language and culture (Crystal, 2001). As the experiences and values of literacy differ among languages and

monolithic entity, as authors have to create a text that is "general enough that it can be used by all students, regardless of their background, proficiency level, or learning style." (Ever, learners (even at the same proficiency level) come from many different backgrounds and arrive (with varying) goals. Therefore, when learners use the same text, it can act as a type of normative or even oppressive entity in terms of what it teaches about literacy, especially if learners do not or cannot compare their textbooks lessons (with other experiences.) My analysis is consequently aimed at examining both the functional and sociocultural literacy lessons in textbooks so as to uncover the manifold messages they convey in order to inform teachers, therefore encourage their development of agency in their respective experiences.

## Method

### Textbook Selection

The ESL textbook market has many options, each with their own combination of literacy pedagogies. I narrowed the selection pool; examined my intensive English program (E6) teacher resource library. The library is housed (within an E6 located in the southeastern US at a large public research university. The E6 offers a 50-level program for approximately 50 students from across the globe, (with many from the Middle East and Asia. The program focuses on academic and communicative literacies and proficiencies. The E6's teacher library has hundreds of texts, representing the program's (ide range of pedagogies and student needs. The library has been created over several decades and incorporates texts from across all facets of ESL instruction, thus providing a (ide range of options that are typical of the selection an ESL teacher might encounter. The library is organized to, ideally and includes sections for reading, writing, and listening (writing. However, it is common to teach these skills separately, the importance of acknowledging and teaching the relationships between the four main skills of ESL (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) is increasingly discussed (Alhoniemi, 2004; Walker + Cullen, 2004; Zern, 2000). Sidek (2002) calls for specific attention to academic literacy. Any of the reading (writing) textbooks claim to prioritize literacy acquisition and development, so I included all of the textbooks from this hybrid section. Then, following Sidek's (2002) call for specific attention to academic literacy, I narrowed the pool to textbooks (with this focus. Chen et al. (2001) explain that, in addition to relevant content, one should select a textbook that has been published (within the past ten years.

Three of the textbooks that matched these criteria, I chose (Galloway, 2001; (Galloway + Collins, 2001; and (Galloway + Collins, 2001) for their closeness in publication date, relative length, and self-assessed level. According to the levels professed on their covers, these textbooks should be (written for low, middle, and high-level learners, respectively. This range is intentional to discover any possible differences between goals and values of literacy at different learning stages. Additionally, the layout of each textbook is relatively similar. Each text features at least two color readings (which are 'sally's, , leveled & smaller, reface and , ostface texts! and one color essay or (writing) activity. Each textbook follows Chen et al.'s (2001) suggestion that reading activities should have , re0reading, reading, and , ost0reading activities and that

(riting activities should be integrated in the text. They also effectively integrate reading (riting tasks to present a more holistic notion of literacy than the single skill reading or (riting textbooks. We analyzed these three textbooks, hereinafter referred to as Text A, Text B, and Text C, first for their explicit functional literacy lessons and then for their essential elements (both implicit and explicit) of the sociocultural values of literate English speakers.

### Coding for Literacy

The language acquisition notion of literacy as reading and (riting, is the social, practice conceptualization of literacy resulting in the creation of two categories for qualitative coding of literacy skills and ideologies of literacy. Skill: is a term frequently used in language acquisition (see Drogin, 2008); ideology: is a common term in sociocultural literacy theory (see Jee, 2005). Here, a literacy skill: is any type of functional skill needed to read or (rite and an ideology of literacy: is an essential element (that it means to be literate or how literacy is portrayed in the English-speaking world. Weinkell (2006) claims that learning both literacy skills and ideologies are essential for a successful communication to take place. In this light, teaching the language and the culture of speakers of the target language (ill, roughly and more interdependent: (1) identified each instance in the textbooks that "involve information about reading", (riting", or literacy as a skill or ideology. These instances appear in any format of information (which include explicit language instruction, explicit reading or (riting instruction, and titles for reading, (riting", and academic success and activities (which include reading, responses such as writing, the choice or discussion of questions, language exercises such as "rhetoric or vocabulary builders, and (ritten responses or essays). The following is an example of coding an information and (riting is a re-reading strategy that (ill help you read more fluently and (ith "greater understanding": (1) Focus on the main idea. In this sense, "skimming" is a re-reading strategy: (as coded as a skill (so "ethically" the learner needs to know how to do it and (read more fluently: (as coded as an ideology (a trait valued in the literacy performance. The literacy skills were easier to code because they were largely referred to by the same name across the textbooks. The ideologies of literacy required more careful attention because these elements were less explicitly portrayed and did not have "in" conventions as cohesive as most of the literacy skills. These two categories are more deeply analyzed in their respective sections of this article (here; code, are the data across the three textbooks to target shared skills and ideologies and interpret the implications of these elements for speakers.

## Findings

### Literacy Skills

The literacy skills in these textbooks as defined in this article are the explicit reading and (riting competencies that learners can acquire to develop their literacy. The acquisition of these skills, respectively results in proficiency in reading and (riting in English and, consequently, literacy in English.

### ***A Comparison of the Three Textbooks***

Before examining each textbook's content, describe their layout (will be helpful for understanding how content is designed, scaffolded, and portrayed). \* Here, outline each of the textbooks' content and activities.

Activities for all three chapters. The activities are all related to the chapters. The activities are increasingly difficult. For example, in the first chapter, in the chapter entitled "Astronomy," students write a summary about the reading. In the second chapter, they write a process essay; the third chapter is for an expository essay that requires light research. Finally, in the fourth chapter, students are instructed to write a research essay that includes primary and secondary sources. The scaffolded activities give students opportunities to learn at a level which they feel comfortable and offer room to grow.

has the largest number of readings, with three feature readings per chapter. While this is only one more long reading than the other two textbooks, the inclusion of this additional reading emphasizes the importance of being able to read in English. While each of the readings follows the general chapter theme, such as education in chapter 2, the content of each passage is diverse and engages the reader to new ideas, writing styles, and genres. Furthermore, each reading is longer than the one before it, which develops endurance as the student works their way through the chapter.

has activities, opportunities for students to track their progress and development in their literacy development. The most relevant example of this is the substantial

3i" re

Skills	<i>Four Point</i>	<i>Leap</i>	<i>Skills for Success</i>
Ability to read a variety of texts	Q	Q	Q
Active reading	Q	Q	Q
Comprehension	Q	Q	Q
Evaluating texts	Q	Q	Q
* Analyzing, reading, and reading strategies	Q	Q	Q





*Nations Within the Anglophone World*

... tied to particular countries, those countries' c'lt' res. ... his notion of English change (within s' & c'lt' res of the Anglophone world) can be detrimental to learners, especially because of the narrowness of the English-speaking community: to (hitherto) rivaled dialect users can be exclusionary. Even though the textbooks do not overtly make overt endorsements for certain dialects or c'lt' res, & not including other forms or, besides, the textbooks are complicit in holding hegemonic language ideologies. Consequently, there is a greater c'lt' ral bias than it may seem, & that it is exercised under the guise of academic English, thus rendering covert the messages about the currency of certain literacies.

... The s' & c'lt' res, dominating on their own, (when combined, for the matter, even more so) of Anglophone c'lt' re and its ideologies of literacy that, as portrayed by the textbooks, all English speakers hold. A main message across the textbooks is the pervasiveness of literacy in the English-speaking community and the importance of literacy as a means to communicate (with native speakers to avoid, respectively, makes explicit references to the notion that millions of people can read in English (2007, p. 2). ... his creates the impression that since so many people can read in English, to not be able to read in English is to be part of the otherworldly, the illiterates. ... continues this notion of an illiteracy otherworldly, & saying that ELLs (English Language Learners) realize that they are (way) behind their native speakers' counterparts: (2007, p. 5).

haste, and the need for speed: are (ideas, read in English (hile, phrases related to slo(ness are less pervasive and 's' ally carry a ne"ative connotation, like 9, ainf' lly slo(:. As st' dents see this ideolo"y enacted in the lan"" a"e and c' It' re, they (ill &"in to realize the i%, ortance of /' ickly develo, in" their literacy and &ein" a&le" , ractice literacy skills (ith s, eed in order to &e s' ccessf' lly literate in En"lish. . here is no evidence of st' dents &ein" enco' ra"ed to take their ti%e or that a decelerated , ace (o' ld , erha, s allo( for %ore dee, ly develo, ed skills.

### **Linearity**

n 2a, lan< ( 7--! "ra, hic, he created a no(0fa%o' s and (idely cited, if not so%eti%es %isinter, reted or invalidated, conce, tion of ho( #ve different lan"" a"es1lan"" a"e fa%ilies or"anize their (ritten disco' rse. . he %ost direct , attern is En"lish<, (hich is , ortrayed as a strai"ht line. . his "reatly contrasts fro% the aty, ical sha, es for (' sin" 2a, lan< ter%! 9Se%itic,: 9Ro%ance,: and 9R' ssian: lan"" a"es, or the s, iral for 9>riental: lan"" a"es. . his linear or"anization is stron"ly associated (ith En"lish te\$t, s, as de%onstrated &y the te\$t&ooks< over (hel%in" enco' ra"e%ent to ' se it. says that the reader needs an 9easly te\$t , attern to follo(: (, . 57!, that 9"ood (ritin": is ' ni#ed and coherent (, . 7-!, and that (riters sho' ld &e direct (, . -5!. e\$, lains that 9in "ood (ritin", each , ara"ra, h has ' nity& it e\$, lores one idea: and (arns that 9if yo' %i\$ different ideas in a , ara"ra, h, yo' r readers %ay &eco%e conf' sed, and yo' r (ritin" (ill not &e effective: (, . 00!. ' nderlines the i%, ortance of coherency, lo"ic, and ' nity (, . 27, , . 54! &' t never directly e\$, lains (hat thesen< @a `



## Conclusion

Literacy, UI ESC says, is an important symbol of identity, continuity and self-determination. It is closely intertwined with culture and local values, customs, (world)views and tradition: (\*anne + Scarino, 2002, p. 10). Language learners' literacy textbooks likely recognize literacy as this key to acceptance for speakers of the target language and practitioners of its culture. (What extent do these textbooks provide students with the path to literacy? Unfortunately, none of these textbooks are perfect. Moreover, they all make an important step, by initiating reading and writing so that students can begin to understand the relationship between texts and the importance of the target culture, places on the ability to both interpret and produce text. Hence, in these textbooks, though, students should approach the lessons in their classes with some caution. As demonstrated, different textbooks prioritize different skills and ideologies. Hence this is a problem since there is no official national to academic English literacy and the authors/editors all introduce biases and assumptions about literacy and language learning and teaching, students should utilize multiple resources (e.g., different textbooks, other materials, etc.) and, while keeping in mind the skills and ideologies in mind, be encouraged to develop their own literate identity.

The implications of this textbook analysis are twofold. First, textbooks publishers should be able to include some sort of definition of what they mean by the level that they put on the cover. This delineation should help teachers, different textbook selectors, teachers, and learners to identify the baseline literacy stance of a textbook's target audience. Such informed decision-making offers more agency within the selection process. Second, following any claims in a published linguistic for authentic learning opportunities, providing more relevant details on various contexts (here learners might practice academic English literacy can help make the learning more meaningful and help them transfer their textbook learning to real-world situations. In this vein, recognizing that there are opportunities across the globe to use English (not just Canada, the UK, and the US) will be self-evident for adopting a more oriented towards world Englishes that does not reify ethnocentric ideologies. These suggestions, however, although salient, are aimed at a population which is smaller than the other side of the textbook equation: teachers and students.

Even if textbooks publishers made revisions, the reality is that all language learners' teaching is "open" to feature the realities found in these three textbooks; they will all prioritize certain skills and be intertwined with various sociocultural meanings. It is therefore prudent to focus on helping teachers and language learners understand how to raise awareness and use these textbooks in more meaningful ways. Teachers can help students (or independent learners can do it on their own) identify their learning goals, in terms of both the functional and sociocultural elements of language and literacy acquisition. Hence, students can be more attentive to the lessons in their textbooks and calibrate those messages into the type of language learner they aspire to be. This calibration will be ongoing as learners will continue to define, develop, and refine their literate identity and refashion it as they encounter new literacy situations across various linguistic and



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