

# EDUCAÇÃO e --- TECNOLOGIA



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Instituto Politécnico da Guarda

**Director**  
Álvaro Bento Leal

**Redacção**  
Serviços Centrais do I.P.G.  
Av. Dr. Francisco Sá Carneiro nº 50 \* 6300 Guarda  
Telef. (071) 222634 \* Telecópia (071) 222690

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## Uma participação assumida

Com esta edição a Revista "Educação e Tecnologia" apresenta o seu décimo oitavo número.

Os temas e trabalhos até agora publicados distribuem-se por uma variedade de temáticas que reflectem as várias áreas subjacentes aos cursos leccionados neste Instituto Politécnico.

Apraz registar o aumento e a diversidades de colaborações, sinal evidente da atenção que a nossa Revista tem vindo a suscitar, dentro e fora deste estabelecimento de ensino.

Estamos certos de que esta Revista continuará a sua afirmação e a proporcionar um espaço de apresentação e debate de ideias, de veículo difusor da investigação, pesquisa, reflexão e, simultâneamente, instrumento de apoio pedagógico, como se tem verificado ao longo destes anos da sua existência.

"Educação e Tecnologia" apresenta, com este número, novas propostas e um convite renovado à participação, assumida e responsável, idónea e inovadora.

Álvaro Bento Leal  
Presidente do IPC

# LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL VALUES IN EFL TEXTBOOKS

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Maria dos Anjos Quadrado Gil\*

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The aim of this article is to spell out some aspects of the analysis of discourse as social practice and particularly of the pedagogical discourse of the textbook.

In fact, the school textbook still keeps a prominent place in formal education as the most important tool that the teacher uses to shape the students' education not only in terms of scientific knowledge, but also of social, cultural and even moral messages, projecting a world view in pre-determined ways. It still holds a unique position in all schooling practice, because it actually defines what is to be taught and how, determining choices of content and method. Its authority derives from various sources: the fact that it is legitimized by a prestigious institution as school, the power of the written language which, in literate western societies is considered a more reliable version of knowledge than orality, and finally the "common sense" objectiveness of the texts (the linguistic forms are chosen to make the meaning *true* and "above suspicion").

Two concerns satisfy the significance of this topic: The first has to do with the social construction of the learner and the ideology that is behind a particular discourse. The discursive construction of pupils has been explored by many educational researchers and linguists and I have Fairclough's positions in mind especially those on the role of institutions,

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\* Equiparada a Assistente na E.S.E.

such as school, not only as places of learning, but as primary socialization institutions.

The second refers to an assumption that says that, if you explain to people how texts and language work they can resist their ideological effects and use them in more effective ways. The concern is, then, to provide a basis not only for language awareness, but for informed pedagogical and linguistic choices.

Before exploring in more detail the main conceptual strands which relate to this topic I would like to list some of the issues that best support my rationale:

1. The idea of "discourse technologies": specific discourse types that create certain patterns of social relations.

2. The ideological work of the textbook as an agent of social control as well as of learning.

3. The question of agency: the power of discourse to position individuals within institutions.

4. Halliday's model in exploring the cultural and social values embodied in texts as a framework for text analysis.

1. The concept of "discourse technology" was introduced by Fairclough as a type of discourse which means some kind of control of "legitimate knowledge". It falls into the more general category of *strategic discourse*, discourse oriented to getting results as opposed to *communicative discourse* which aims at establishing understanding between participants. The pedagogical texts of a textbook may indicate stronger or weaker forms of control and different forms of ideologization, but they are always a specialized form of text and belong to a specialized product: the foreign language textbook, a cultural product and a commodity.

2. The question of ideology in the instructional texts of the textbooks is a central one when we attempt at examining, and explaining the meanings entailed in them. To give a definition of this concept I will quote Fairclough when he says: "Institutional practices which people draw upon without thinking often embody assumptions which directly or indirectly legitimize existing power relations. Such assumptions are ideologies." In this sense we understand the idea of struggle introduced by Fairclough as the mechanisms of resistance to the ideology, and the textbook can be both an instrument of domination and a site for resistance. A key strategy in this struggle is the idea of *common sense* that makes *naturally* acceptable what should be considered as legitimate knowledge to be transmitted to pupils.

In the specific social institution that the school is, there is the specific context of the classroom with its hierarchal and predefined social relations and a specific kind of information exchange: textbook and teacher are the authorized agents and the pupil is the passive receiver of the legitimate knowledge. This unequal distribution of power is configured by the

textbook. Its selection of contents, themes and situations is arbitrary and ideology - bound and the ultimate responsible for it are the textbook author who is involved in the production and the publisher, who is involved with the marketization of the textbook as a commodity.

The linguistic features of the texts in textbooks portray a reality that belongs exclusively to an ideological construction of a world where gender, ethnic or class differences are ignored.

The leaving out of dialects or other *contaminated* forms of non standard English is also an ideological choice and an interesting issue, to analyse with reference to sociolinguistics and especially to Holmes's readings. That is why I feel it might be interesting to include here some discussion of the social and political significance of the pedagogical discourse of the textbook considered as a variety of language.

Sociolinguists are also concerned with discourse - language as social practice, but their concept of pedagogical discourse is ideologically neutral. They see it as a codification of standard forms and models and emphasize its role in developing the speaker's communicative competence, that is the capacity to produce a correct utterance when it is appropriate to do so. This prescriptive activity includes some ideological commitments that are also shaped in some literacy practices in the classroom including the use of the textbook.

3. In this framework emphases is placed on school as an agent of reproduction of dominant culture. This is achieved by creating subjects who follow the power embodied in the pedagogical discourse of the textbook. The following quotation better illustrates these ideas: "Discourses experienced in school will over a period of time help define the kinds of people that pupils become."

Subject positions in schools - teachers and pupils *are what they do and what they are allowed or required to say* - is a key issue in the reproduction of social structure. So discourse reproduces social structure and the teacher and pupil positions embedded in educational discourse are reproduced in it.

4. To Halliday's framework belongs such notions as the register's category of field, tenor and mode and the claim that the linguistic features of the text, the lexical and grammar choices, are affected by particular views of reality and encode the social relationships between participants in such a way that the pupils' location in society will be determined by the form of language which they learn.. This argument was developed by Fairclough who argues that "language is a material form of ideology". This implies that when teaching someone "how to mean" in Halliday's model, the kind of strategies that are used and the kind of discourse that they are being exposed to, is of great value.

The use of the language textbook is closely associated to the institutionalized discourse of the classroom and its literary

practices especially the activities of reading and writing. It may be interesting then to discuss the theoretical issues that underpin these social practices which involve people and institutions as well as to highlight the different value systems that permeate the contemporary politics of literacy to which most of the textbooks currently at use belong.

How to recognise a piece of written material as a text and how to make sense of it, together with the ability of matching form to function according to the genre conventions are some of the kinds of knowledge that students have to mobilise when reading or writing a text. In order to understand a text a reader needs to know not only the organizational rules of the semiotic system in which it is encoded but also to use their individual resources of intertextuality (knowledge of other texts) and schemata (general experience of the world).

All these kinds of knowledge are what we may call in a narrow sense literacy.

Making sense of print in the sense of becoming a reader and becoming a writer is a natural process and it always involves a social perspective. This concept draws upon Halliday who once said that learning language is learning how to mean. Thus, to talk of language is to talk of the social situation within which meanings are generated. The concept of text as any language transaction that encodes the social relationships between participants is a key one when we want to put forward the idea that children's location in the social system will be determined by the form of language that they learn.

Reading and writing activities in the classroom are interdependent. Their dynamic relationship lies upon concepts of intertextuality and cultural and contextual frames of reference. These frames of reference are culturally embedded and it is through the instructional texts of the textbook that school filters most of the social reality that it aims at representing.

Experiencing texts in the sense of critically interpreting their meanings and consciously reflecting upon language in itself and how it functions in social contexts leads us to the concept of language awareness and its importance in children's literacy development. All the classroom activities that aim at empowering students, that is at "developing people's capacities to explore the full range of what is possible within a given order of discourse without actually changing it" (I am quoting Fairclough's definition of empowerment) so that they become more critical, at improving their performance and command of language and at promoting cross cultural understanding of linguistic diversity are a necessary complement to the development of children's capabilities as producers and interpreters of discourse.

Another important issue in the teaching and learning of literacy is what Fairclough sees as "power behind discourse": children are taught to take up different subject positions within school discourse in comparison with that at home. Very often the dominant literacy marginalises the informal and vernacular literacies that children take with them when they come to school and which could give a valuable insight to their personal and social values and be used as a valuable resource for learning. This mismatch between the discourse styles of children at home and those used in school is one of the most frequent causes for academic failure and a question of power and struggle for dominance. Doing well at school relies heavily on the capacity of acquiring the dominant literacy.

Reading and writing proficiency has long been considered as the key to academic, professional and social success. This is a relatively safe assumption. What has been questionable is the kind of proficiency we are talking about. If we want to reach the heart of the matter we may resume the whole problem to the increasing demand from modern societies of the individual in terms of literacy. The individual needs to be increasingly competent in their literacy skills and to have a wider knowledgeable range of resources to cope with the complex everyday literacy practices: decoding official forms, advertising texts and other forms of strategic discourses, answering letters, questionnaires and tests and the various forms of visual texts that require specialised forms of literacy.

At this point we have reached some of the basic assumptions which inform not only the pedagogical theories as a whole but the school system itself in its work of producing literate subjects. It is time to analyse briefly the various pedagogical theories that have informed language teaching in most recent years. At the heart of the debate over how literacy should be taught is the issue of the social distribution of knowledge and the institutional positioning of individuals. In essence the question is: What subject's identity is built by the educational value systems of the different theories?

Over the past twenty years our schools have contributed significantly to the construction of social subjects. Literacy instruction has gradually recognised that becoming literate has more to do with taking on the cultural meanings and uses of different literacy practices than imposing a self contained package of skills, which was the aim of the "old" autonomous model of literacy. This neutral value-free set of skills or techniques for reading and writing were acquired in formal education and helped people become more productive and employable in a world of social and economic development. This commonsense assumption that literacy leads to employment shifted responsibility and blame for unemployment to the individual rather than to the economic and social structures.



Opposed to this model is the progressive approach. Its emphasis is on the students achieving their own language potential and constructing their own meanings with the teacher's help in a less authoritarian environment. Learning how to learn and the notions of personal voice and creativity are more important than transmitting a set of truths. This "new" literacy is concerned in promoting meaning-centred language learning activities.

A more recent and radical approach draws upon critical literacy concerns. This ideological model prefers to talk about different literacy practices, because it recognises a multiplicity of literacies related to specific cultural contexts and deeply associated with relations of power and ideology. These different literacies are related to particular cultural identities and ultimately to different aspects of personhood. Fairclough raises the question that the different literacy practices in which we are engaged may explain the kind of person and social being that we become. Literacy practices are constitutive of identities. They position us within school in different ways as learners and in relation to knowledge, because school is in control of what counts as legitimate knowledge and how it should be taught. To make sense of classroom discourse we must know about the social relations which are held in this institution and about the meanings that emerge from the texts according to the world knowledge and the interpretative strategies that readers bring to them.

The competing discourses between the autonomous asseptic model of literacy, synonymous with academic performance and the ideological model shaped by particular attitudes about the meanings and functions that literacy can have in different contexts, have informed many of the educational options in the teaching of reading and writing in recent years.

When we attend a course or a school we are doing more than learning to read and write or even to take a degree. We are accepting or resisting the roles that the institution has set up for us. In a society as complex as ours, tendencies will not be a simple matter of progression, but a difficult and sometimes contradictory building up of values and attitudes towards a new reality.

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