The Representation of Arabs and Turks in the Libyan English Language Teaching Textbooks

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ABSTRACT

One of Critical Discourse Analysis’s characteristics (CDA) is describing discourse as a form of social practice where language use is construed as a socially influenced and influential factor that can utilise, produce, construct and shape social realities. CDA is committed to reveal connections between language use, power, and ideology within any social practice. Therefore, this article seeks to explore how ‘the Orient’ is represented discursively in the English language textbooks used in Libyan schools. The article is confined to a passage taken from the Social Sciences Year Two textbook. The study draws upon the discourse of Orientalism whilst the analysis is guided by an adapted framework of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis. The chosen passage reflects my particular position in relation to the discourse of Orientalism as described by Said in 1978. The article concludes, among other things, that the Arabs are collectively represented and discursively produced and constructed regardless the huge geographical space they live on. In addition, the Ottoman Empire is reduced discursively into the Turks. Language structures thus indicate a positive and limited picture of the Occident ‘Us’ and that ‘the Other’ ‘Them’ is presented in a negative and barbaric way. The study established that the role of the textbooks does not produce what they are supposed to. In this context, the authors need to dig deeply and reflect what they write upon the social reality of their target students and not from the lenses of the authors per se. In other words, ‘the Other’s social reality should not be manipulated or distorted.

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1. Introduction

No one can deny the significant role that the English language plays nowadays. As a result, the teaching and learning of English has been an objective of most non-English speaking countries. Certain ideas and beliefs are introduced within a language – consciously or unconsciously – to offer information and knowledge, but often within a certain ideological perspective (Fairclough, 1989; Seguin, 1989; Apple, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). However, such ideas and beliefs may not be representative of the society where language is being learned or taught. In such a situation, it might be useful to raise teachers’, policy makers’ and students’ awareness of language and culture because cultural “… representations … have real consequences for real people, not just in the way they are treated … but in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in a given society” (Dyer, 1993, p. 3).

Despite the widespread, and the importance, use of English language textbooks in schools, research suggests that people and cultures are still subtly misrepresented. Kachru (1992, p. 67) asserts that “[f]or the first time a natural language has attained the status of international (universal) language, especially for cross-cultural communication” when he writes about the English language. However, it is maintained that “English language teaching beliefs, practices and materials are never neutral, and indeed represent a particular understanding of language …” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 178). Therefore, there is an urge to explore how ‘the Orient’ and its culture is represented in English Language textbooks used in Libyan secondary schools especially because these textbooks were produced outside Libya (in the United Kingdom). The study involved the analysis of language structures by using an adapted framework of Fairclough’s (1989) approach to CDA encapsulated theoretically by the discourse of Post-colonialism and the discourse of Orientalism.

Perhaps, one of the most controversial issues, that was taken and advanced by Professor Edward Said, is his absolute support of Palestinian claims to sovereignty even though he lived on the soil of the first nation to recognize the so-called ‘state of Israel’. In connection with that, he produced his outstanding book entitled ‘the Question of Palestine’ (1980). This article argues that the Palestinian problem is being outdated deliberately in the English language textbooks, which are authored and produced in the United Kingdom, even though such materials are supposed to be neutral. However, languages are never neutral because they always serve ideological and political stances. The article also argues that the whole Arabs are reduced and essentialised discursively to one particular place (desert and Wadi Rom). The Ottoman Empire was also reduced discursively to the Turks.

2. Why English Language Textbooks Matter?

A textbook is provided to support the teacher and the students in the learning and teaching processes. The complexity of teaching materials requires careful consideration of the content, structure and sequence in order to establish the information in a particular order. However, the kind of information and knowledge which is presented in the textbooks may not correspond and reflect the cultural background of the students. In this case, English as Foreign Language (EFL) textbook writers think, compose, and produce, predominantly, through culture-specific lenses (Alptekin, 1993; Hartman & Judd,
1978; Oakes & Saunders, 2002; Risager, 1991) that reflect the writers’ mental representations about the world. The acceptance of particular representations or traditions as authentic often marginalises and distorts others. This may be the case in many language textbooks, particularly the most widely second language taught courses. However, in reality, Said confirms that “No one today is purely one thing; no one has a single identity” (Said, 1993, p. 407).

Textbook writers transmit (consciously or unconsciously) particular constructions of reality and particular ways of selecting and organising the world (Apple, 1992; Alptekin, 1993; Risager, 1991) where “... language connects with the social entity through being the primary domain of ideology and through being [the] site of struggles of power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 14-15). Thus, the cultural content of the English language textbooks, used in Libyan schools, will be based upon the perception of western authors and how they view the world. In this respect, textbooks are seen as an ideology in the sense that they reflect a world view and cultural system which reflect the authors’ culture or/and their surroundings. As a result, textbooks are a source of social conflict (nationally or internationally) because of the multiplicity of readings over space and time and what is included in the textbooks may not reflect (totally or partly) the actual life and culture of the target learners ( Hunston & Thompson, 2000). And, as language textbooks play a vital role in the process of education; English language teaching is no exception.

English language textbooks have a great impact on the attitudes and behaviour of the students. Ideally, the textbooks should be more meaningful and relevant to the life experiences of the students and they should prepare them for real life situations since the textbooks dominate the educational practices. Regarding this, some researchers such as Blumberg (2007); Maxwell (1985); Sheldon (1988); Woodward (1993); Williams (1983) identify the role of the textbooks as the most dominant element in classrooms aside from teachers, students and physical space. In this case, Maxwell (1985, p. 68) states that “[t]he text determines what is taught, when it is taught, and how it is taught”. In addition, they are often used and consumed in different educational practices with different socio-political and cultural realities. Inevitably, they usually include hidden and opaque ideological practices as they are viewed and consumed from a different cultural practice which is different from the authors’ reality. Regarding this, Ellis (1990) argues that Western-produced textbooks are ethnocentric as they are presented in a way to offend Islamic practices (cited in Giaschi, 2000).

Textbooks, therefore, are an omnipresent part of classroom life because language teaching is mostly associated with them (Blumberg, 2007; Maxwell, 1985; Sheldon, 1988; Woodward, 1993; Williams). In this context, language teaching is influenced by the language textbooks that are provided by an educational body and are regarded as the main source of information about a foreign culture. In this respect, textbooks become a focus of much political and cultural controversy as they are often the only access to other cultures (Apple, 1992; de Castell; 1990; Brosh, 1997; Goldstein; 1997; Oakes & Saunders, 2002; Woodward, 1993). It can be argued that textbooks are cultural and political government documents since they reflect a particular set of views (Apple, 1992; Oakes & Saunders, 2002; Risager, 1991).

Kubota (1998) claims that negative views of certain aspects in the world are...
promoted by English language teaching per se. Furthermore, textbooks often carry with them unbalanced ideological views because they do not include unbiased and objective materials that might (re)shape their readers and fossilise certain ways of viewing and seeing the world. In addition, they fail to question inequalities and injustices that exist in the world in which an ideal image of the target language is often initiated. Kubota (1998) concluded that the place of English language teaching in Japan is not restricted to its superiority but to the changing of behaviour of Japanese students. Regarding this, she insists that “…by learning English, the Japanese have adopted native English speakers’ view of the world” (Kubota, 1998, p. 298). This suggestion may be approached by any student in terms of viewing the world from the perspectives of the English language textbooks’ authors in which both groups are originated from different cultural and social realities.

3. Methodological Framework

As it has been pointed out previously, the study is conducted from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective. Before turning towards the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) a brief introduction has to be given in relation to Fairclough’s analytical model (see Figure 1).

Figure: 1 Three dimensional model of discourse (adapted from Fairclough, 1995:98)

Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) model (Figure:1) for CDA consists of three intertwined dimensions of analysis. These dimensions are the object of analysis - including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts-, the processes by which the object is produced and consumed (writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects and the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes. These dimensions require a different kind of analysis including text analysis (description), discursive analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation).

The description dimension is based on the questions that are posed by Fairclough (1989) to analyse a passage which is used in English language textbooks. Such analysis includes vocabulary and grammatical features, including word choice and repetition, use of pronouns and active or passive verbs, and relationships between subject, verb, and object, among others. These questions help to identify the experiential, relational, and expressive values of words (i.e., vocabulary) and grammatical features in a given text. Experiential value refers to the ways language encodes the producer’s knowledge or “experience of the natural or social world” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 112), including ideological representations. The relational value of a text reflects and creates social relationships (e.g., between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’), while the expressive value conveys the producer’s appraisal or evaluation of reality or truth. Therefore, Fairclough’s questions will help to identify how the western authors (the textbooks are authored and produced in the UK) construct and produce discursively the social reality to the Libyan students. The interpretive dimension is based on the researcher’s background which deals with the understanding of meaning embedded in texts.
The level of interpretation is concerned with participant's text production and text interpretation (understanding). Texts are produced and interpreted against a background of commonsense assumptions. The interpretations are generated through the combination of what is in the text and what knowledge and beliefs the interpreter holds (Fairclough, 1989), which according to Gee (1999) is the knowledge of language, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools and places of events that are recognisable to people as a particular type of identity that may engage in a particular type of activity. In Fairclough's terms, 'members' resources' (MR) are the background knowledge and the interpretative procedures that help to recognise ideological constructions (Fairclough, 1989, p. 141-143).

Using our background knowledge is essential in the analysis as stated by De Beaugrande (1980, p. 30) that “[t]he question of how people know what is going on in a text is a special case of the question of how people know what is going on in the world at all”. In this sense, “[h]umans understand what is said to them in terms of their own knowledge and beliefs about the world” (Schank, 1979 cited in Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 7). Thus, the interpretation of a text is usually based upon the previous/current experiences of the world. The last dimension of Fairclough’s analytical model is the explanation dimension. In this article, the analysis will be reflected upon the discourse of Post-colonialism and the discourse of Orientalism which will be discussed below.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Post-colonialism

Post-colonialism is a discourse of resistance against the mechanisms of oppression and imperialism which were created through unequal relationships and representations during the era of colonialism. Under so-called ‘colonialism’, the colonised often adopt the values and norms of the colonisers. In this sense, a particular value system can often be taught as being the best and the most ontologically accurate one. This, of course, is more often the values and norms of historically contingent colonisers during a particular period of time. Colonisers, thus, rule the world not just militarily and economically, but also ideologically and culturally (wa Thiong'o, 1986). Post-colonialism ultimately contends that people should be equal in the world in terms of shaping, reshaping and refuting political, economic, cultural and educational perspectives (Young, 2003).

There are remnants of modern Western colonialism that are not easy to overcome such as the on-going effort of the colonised to decolonise themselves from the dominant language. In line with this, the language of the dominant colonial nation is often a disadvantage and was and is used as a tool of separation between master and subject. This notion of linguistic imperialism is supported by Fanon in his famous work *Black Skin White Masks* where he states that “... a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (Fanon, 1967, p. 18).

Post-colonialism is concerned with examining the impact of the European imperialists on a significant swathe of the Eastern world in terms of colonisation, the domination of land, the control of people and the non-coercive control of ideas and cultural conceptions and perceptions. The post-colonialist thought system is also concerned with the inherited ideas of European superiority over non-Europeans and the propagation of this idea through
direct and indirect means in terms of cultural reproductive systems such as educational institutions and frameworks (Said, 1978). Therefore, post-colonialism seeks to expose the raw empirical effects and the ideational assumptions of the colonisers on the colonised. In this sense, post-colonialism attempts to formulate non-western forms of discourse as a viable means of challenging the West an example of which is “The Question of ‘White Studies’” (Multiworld, 2003). This attempt at making a new form of challenge, thus, uses discursive practices which question the very ‘rationality’ of the West and its supposedly objective values, rather than proposing ‘more rational/true’ resolutions to the problems of colonialism and imperial subjugation.

Post-colonialism tends to try and shift the ways in which both the west and non-West peoples conventionally view the world. It fragments the old perspective so as to enable new and diverse voices to describe and represent cultures and difference. Bhabha (1994) asserts that colonialism operates within the dimensions of time, history and space. The first two (time and history) dimensions are concerned with geographical aspects. The third, what he calls the “third space”, is a cultural re-conceptualisation which comes to be regarded as the new order of the world through the shaping of knowledge reworked via long-standing coercive and manipulative power dynamics.

Bhabha (1994, p. 112-113) reflects on the notion of “fixity” and asserts that, in post-colonialism, there is a theoretical move away from a focus on fixity to “hybridity”. The former refers to the way that natural, unchanging situations and facts were assigned to groups of people during the Western colonial era of modernity. Certain dichotomies and hierarchies were created by the colonial powers during the epoch of modern Western imperialism in order to (re)produce the myth of an unchanging set of historical patterns, normative realities and value systems, both in the West and in the Orient. Hybridity describes the way that socially constructed identities are not fixed, but in actual fact are constantly in flux and evolving in complex and unpredictable ways. Thus, one should not rely on highly contorted and ideologically charged Western constructions of the Oriental Other as such constructions are often more informed and shaped by the tenets of ‘fixed’ cultural blocs rather than by actual observation and experience.

In “Black Skin White Masks” Fanon (1967) suggests that modern Western colonialism brought about a value-laden and normative division between whites and non-whites. From this perspective, the former is superior over the latter in terms of possession of power, right to access to construe and create knowledge and the right to shape aspects of the internal and external life of a colonised (non-white) society. He argues that the history, culture, values, language, and raw capital belonging to whites begin to be considered universally grounded by the colonised. This sense of inferiority experienced by non-whites, thus, leads to an acceptance of the norms and the values of the colonisers on the grounds that the distinction between master and slave is grounded in Reason and Nature. In such a position, colonised people often abandon their own culture, as well as their language and associated belief systems. What thus presented is a particular view of reality, from the perspective of the colonisers, which is absorbed at societal and global levels and then articulated and mediated through cultural sources such as
the mass media and educational institutions (Rassool, 2007).

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak (1995) challenged the “legacy of colonialism”. Her focus was on the cultural discourses of the marginalised and dominated people being shaped and defined by those who are dominant and powerful i.e. Western cultures. She discusses the representation of the Subaltern as an essentialist ‘Other’ to Europe which is anonymous, mute and disempowered when it comes to defining itself. She states that Western intellectuals and institutions concealed the Subalterns’ experiences by muting their voices individually and collectively. As a result, they came to be oppressed, marginalised, devalued and sequestered from the prevailing discourse. Thus, the subaltern is constructed discursively in a way which does not reflect their diverse and autonomous reality of self-identification by the Subalterns themselves. Young (2001) states that “post-colonialism is neither western nor non-western, but a dialectical product of interaction between the two, articulating new counterpoints of insurgency from the long-running power struggles that predate and post-date colonialism” (P. 68). Therefore, it is a constant discursive struggle between the Western and non-Western. It can be argued that the concept of post-colonialism is not a welcome notion from the perspective of certain dominant discourses because it struggles and refutes the superiority of Western culture over other cultures (Young, 2003).

The discourse of post-colonialism has, thus, been applied to challenge the authority of Orientalist representation and domination over Oriental subjects and Oriental politics (Said, 1978). It is essential for Orientals to write about and reproduce themselves discursively rather than tacitly consenting to the Western conception of the Orient as an exotic encounter of otherness abroad (Salaita, 2008). It can be concluded, then, that post-colonialism is the body of literature that seeks to affirm that there should be mutual respect between people whether they are/were colonised or whether they were the colonisers. Moreover, post-colonialism is a phenomenon that contests the practices of colonialism whether they are overt and political/military or covert and educational, cultural and ideological. Despite African countries gaining independence, they are still politically, educationally and ideologically controlled by their former colonisers (Kiwanuka, 1973). Post-colonialism is a struggle against the effects of colonialism in spheres covering tangible military coercion but also those involving ideas and conceptions of otherhood and selfhood. Its ultimate goal is to establish how the world can move beyond the period of colonialism towards a place of mutual respect and integrity. Post-colonialism, thus, also seeks to develop equitable and empowering dialogue between West and East.

4.2 Orientalism
Michel Foucault calls Orientalism a ‘discourse’: a coherent and strongly bounded area of social knowledge; a system of statements by which the world can be known. Orientalism has been deployed to execute authority and domination over the Orient (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001). The Orient, in this context, includes mainly the countries of the Middle East and those of South Asia. Said (1978, p. 99) suggests that the Orient is divided into a ‘good’ Orient in classical India, and a ‘bad’ Orient in present-day Asia and North Africa.
Orientalism is derived from the literary, artistic, scientific and general scholarly works of 'the Orientalist'. It is associated with those in the West engaged in study of the Orient. It is and was a vision of an imagined reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (Orient, the East, “them”) (Said, 1978, p. 43). This idealist and essentialist division of East and West has existed for centuries, with the West having the ideational and crude power to establish how the reality of the East might be represented (Said, 1978). In this context, the imaginative geography of ‘East and West’ legitimizes a representative discourse which is foreign to the Orient but becomes the way in which the Orient is known and understood by the West, and even by some in the East. Orientalism becomes a process through which certain contingent, anecdotal and particular aspects of the Orient come to be fixed, necessary and universally applicable across the Orient (Said, 1978). Post-colonialism refutes this perception of the Orient as a fixed and unchanging entity.

In his famous book, Orientalism, Said (1978) explores the ways in which writers from imperial centres such as Britain and France represented (in literature and art) their occupied territories in the Middle East and North Africa, the Orient, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For Said, Orientalism is an “imperialist tradition” (1978, p. 15), representing “... a kind of intellectual authority over the Orient within Western culture” (Said, 1978, p. 19, emphasis in original). He claims that the relations between the West and the Orient are not symmetrical or deliberative as the former outweighs the latter in most aspects of life and is determining and controlling over representations of both. Thus, the Orient is not able to think freely as it is controlled politically, ideologically and imaginatively in actions and thoughts (Said, 1978). Said (1978) links his work to the idea that when the Occident, Europe, or the West, looks at the Orient, it makes use of certain preconceptions. Said states that “…human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into different cultures, histories, traditions, societies [and] races” (Said, 1978, p. 45). Thus, the study of Orientalism tries to answer the following question: why when the West thinks of the Middle East or the Orient do they construct them in such a predetermined and predestined way? This predetermined mode of thought involves making writ large assumptions about the kind of people that live there, what they believe and how they look and behave.

Orientalism attempts to answer the question of how people understand other people based upon, for example, the colour of their skin, religion or/and culture. For example, “Christian misunderstanding and distortion of Islam was ... supported by a series of myths and legends that were widely believed in Mediaeval times” (Macfie, 2002, p. 43) so that, unlike other religions, Islam is depicted as an essentially violent religion (Macfie, 2002). Islam also has been described in terms of utter contrast to Western society in which the “...Islamic [and other Oriental] civilisation is static and locked within its sacred customs, its formal moral code, and its religious law” (Tuner, 1978, p. 6). Also notable in Orientalist work is the stereotypical image of Oriental women “...as erotic victims and as scheming witches” (Kabbani, 1986, p. 26). Such descriptions reinforce perceptions that the ‘Other’ continues to exist in an inferior position to...
the Western self and is burdened by the inaccurate presuppositions of the past.

Holliday (2005, 19, p. 20) provides an overall summary, using different sources, and states that Orientalism creates stereotypical images of both the West and the East, with ‘the Self’ understood as being essentially rational, progressive, developed, humane, authentic, creative, original and active, and with the Orient – the East – seen as irrational, easy to dominate, inferior, inauthentic and exotic.

Based on this conceptualisation of Orientalism, Said (1978, p. 3) states that:
Orientalism is dealing with the Orient and making statements about them, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, setting it, ruling over it in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (emphasis added).

Chatterjee (1986, p. 36) concurs with Said in stating that the Orientals became “...an object of study, stamped with an [essentialist and exotic] otherness”. Orientalism was thus a project of imperial hegemony of ideas and group definitions in which colonised peoples came to construe themselves in terms generated by their colonisers. This is indicated clearly in Said’s “Two Visions in Heart of Darkness” article where he states that:
Westerners may have physically left their old colonies in Africa and Asia, but they retained them not only as markets but as locales on the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually (Said, 1993, p. 24).

Ziegler (2008) affirms that “Westerners may have physically left their old colonies in Africa and Asia, but they retained them not only as markets but as locales on the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually (Said, 1993, p. 24).

Ziegler (2008) affirms that “Western colonialism has not yet been fully abandoned; it is just that the methods have changed” (as cited in Richter and McPherson, 2012, p. 204). This change has seen the Western world use its notion of a claim to objective and scientific-rational knowledge to sequester opponent texts and discourses from the public sphere. Orientalism legitimates an imbalanced power relationship between the Orient and the Occident in the sphere of knowledge claims and representations of cultural entities. It constructs an image of Orientals which makes them less human and less valuable than Europeans (Said, 1980) and subservient and subject to domination by the Occident (Ashcroft & A. Hluwalia, 2001). When the Orient is represented, thus, it is not about “truth” but about power (Ashcroft, 2010). Indeed, this discursive power is associated closely with the construction of knowledge about the Orient. Knowledge gives power and more power requires more knowledge (Said, 1978). Post-colonialism challenges the constructed image of the Orient as less valuable and less humane than Europe.

It could be assumed that there is a dialectic relation between power, knowledge and the Occident. In the context of English language textbooks, the Orient is shaped, contained and represented by frameworks such as images and discourses. Consequently the textbooks create and describe the reality of the Orient from the viewpoint of the authors since the Orientals themselves are not meant to write English language textbooks for themselves. Said (1978, p. 207) maintains that
... along with other people variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilised, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism... The Oriental was thus linked to elements in Western society [such as] delinquents, the insane, women, the poor, having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien.
The Orientalist makes Orientalism an important factor in transforming the Orient from something into something else for the sake of Occidental culture (Said, 1978). Hence, from an Eastern perspective, the study of the Orient has been always from an Occidental or Western point of view. This ensures that the Orient’s culture is viewed as a perversion and as inferior to the West. Post-colonialism remains significant for positive reasons; it exposes the West’s stigmatising of others and has an honest desire to initiate a discourse of transformation (Ashcroft, 2010). In this situation, “[Arabs] need to provide the images of their reality, replacing the representations of violence that dominate the media with ... images of a valid cultural reality” (Ashcroft, 2010, p. 300). Thus, dominant stereotypical and discursive misrepresentations need to be challenged and replaced by more appropriate ones since “... dominant practices and conventions may be confronted with alternative and oppositional ones” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 9).

Arabs are prevented from representing themselves because they are incapable of doing so. This confirms Marx’s idea that “... they [Arabs] cannot represent themselves; they must be represented,” which Said cites in his Orientalism book (1978, p. 293). Nagel and Staeheli (2008, p. 88) argue that “... the Arabs had chosen to make themselves invisible out of a sense of fear or lack of self confidence, or simply out of apathy”. In this sense, Said (1978) is correct insofar as most Arab countries are governed by dictators who will censor most of what is written in that part of the world.

To conclude, it can be seen that the West produces its representation of itself on the one hand as good, powerful and superior. On the other hand, it represents the non-Western (Other) as deficient, weak and inferior. Thus, the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is one of domination or in Gramsci’s notion a relation of hegemony (1971). In this sense, domination is the production of an unequal relationship between the Occident and the Orient. Therefore, Orientalism is a critique of the negative Western impact on the non-Western world. It can be agreed with Said (1978) that the concept of Orientalism is a structure of lies and myths about the Orient exclusively for the benefit of West, which will be supported in the analysis.

5. The sample

Figure: 2 is a written passage about the freedom of the Arabs. It is part of a lesson about holidays in the Middle East. The passage takes the form of someone (presumably from Jordan) telling a story to someone else who would presumably be a tourist. In reality, however, the passage represents a political discourse rather than a tourism one.

In terms of the experiential value of language (which is part of the description dimension of CDA) three types of processes are included to cover material, mental and relational processes. Regarding the material process, ‘Something very important happened here a long time ago’ the use of an unidentified subject ‘something’ makes the sentence vague.
about what happened. In addition, the use of the past simple tense refers to the completion of the event or the situation and that it does not exist anymore. The use of the phrase ‘a long time ago’ implies a time in the past which has been forgotten. However, it might be argued that this important event is not forgotten and is still alive in the minds of the Arabs. It is not clear from the text what ‘something’ refers to. Referring to the mental process in the example, ‘We Arabs decided to fight the Turks who used to control large parts of the Arab world’, the subject ‘senser’ is mentioned clearly ‘We Arabs’ and ‘the Turks’ is ‘phenomenon’ (the thing that is perceived) (Bloor & Bloor, 1995). In this regard, the Arabs were in the position of the actor while the Turks are in the position of being acted upon. What is discursively omitted is that the former received support from Western powers whose position is often identified in the subject position (actors or the doers). The last process is the existential process, ‘Europe was at war then’, which has the actor as ‘Europe’ and the circumstances ‘at war’ as a propositional phrase. Unlike the mental process, existential processes do not require the sentence to have a ‘goal’ or a ‘patient’ upon which the action takes place. Unlike the Arabs and the Turks, the European empires were disguised discursively.

Another part of the description stage of CDA is the relational value of language which deals with the existence of declarative and negative sentences within the passage. The high incidence of declarative clauses throughout the passage demonstrates that the verbal component does not seem to encourage much interaction between the students and their teachers. In addition, this indicates that the writers are only providing certain discourses to be taken for granted by the readers. The readers are discursively positioned to do this since discourses are ideologically manifested and have a strong impact on shaping their sense of reality (Nguyen, 2012). This kind of ideology is known as consent ideology. Regarding ideology, Fairclough (1992, p. 95) states that: ‘... it is mainly in discourse that consent is achieved, ideologies are transmitted, and practices, meanings, values and identities are taught and learnt.’

The main subjects (the actors) in the sample are the Arabs and the Turks. Europe is mentioned as a continent not as a people, an ethnicity or a collection of imperial powers which distances the Europeans from being involved in this situation even though they were very much involved. Or it might be used as a metaphor where Europe was at war which would be more appropriate in this case. In terms of the Arab-Turkish war, it is presumed that the authors are talking about Jordan as Wadi Rum which is where the Arabs met and fought the Turks for their freedom. The authors stated that Europe was at war but disguised who was warring with whom. Therefore, unlike the war between the Arabs and Turks, the rivals of Europe are hidden discursively. What can be considered here is that the notion of foregrounding (what concepts or issues are emphasised and stressed) and backgrounding (what concepts or issues are played down and deemphasised) (Paltridge, 2006) are represented as the Turks and Europe respectively. Thus, certain social, cultural and political forms and values are made discursively predominant and influential.

In this case, a semantic feature of the passage is omitted. This might suggest that the success of the Arabs is based on
Europe and the failure of the Arabs would be the failure of the European ambition. However, Salaita (2008) claims that omissions are possible in order to reduce “complex social and cultural phenomena in the Arab World [and the Turks] to the level of irrational barbarism” (Salaita, 2008, p. 6).

On the other hand, such omission here might be seen as part of ‘the mental model’ (Wodak, 2001) or what Fairclough (1989) calls M R or shared knowledge that might be used to analyse a discourse in which the readers would use their schemata to unearth such subtle meanings. However, in this case, it is unlikely that the students would be able to use their schemata in their reading comprehension as they are not old enough or have not read or encountered such information before. Thus, the students may not have the required mental model or schemata to understand the subtle meaning in the passage (Nunan, 1991). Regarding this, the shared knowledge of the reader would not be utilised to underpin the hidden meaning of this historical discourse omission.

The major and obvious omission here is the relationship between the Arabs, the Turks and the European imperial powers during the First World War. For example, the Arabs fought the Turks with the assistance of the British, Italians and the French; while the Turks were supported by the Germans. Therefore, supporting the Arabs against the Turkish or the Islamic Empire had a concealed reason for Europe. Some would argue that such support was for the sake of the Arabs to gain their freedom. Fanon (1967) insists that the struggle for freedom is a necessary and inevitable violent process between two forces opposed to each other’s very nature. However, in reality the Arabs and Turks did not oppose each other during that time. Thus, what is discursively concealed is that the western powers used the Arabs to fight the Turks on their behalf.

After the Turks were driven out of the Arab world, the latter was controlled by the western powers such as the British, the Italians and the French. In this case, the Arabs were under a new coloniser more alien and strange than the Turkish one. What should be noted in this example is that the Ottoman Empire is discursively downgraded into ‘the Turks’. Regarding this, Lewis (1993, p. 7) states that “Europeans [used] to call the Muslims by ... ethnic names ... to diminish their stature and significance and to reduce them to something local or even tribal”. In a similar vein, Kayali (1997) asserts that the Ottoman past was selected and distorted in order to stigmatise and devalue it.

Concerning the notion of reduction, the Arab nations were reduced and produced discursively in one place ‘Wadi Rum’. It is doubtful that the Moroccans or Libyans fought the Ottoman Empire in Wadi Rum. Thus, the enormous size and diversity of the Arab countries is reduced and essentialised discursively into one place which is Wadi Rum in Jordan. The land of the Arabs also is reduced to one category ‘desert’, ‘they came together across the desert to this place – Wadi Rum’. Here, there is a discursive stereotypical assumption that the land of the Arabs is only desert and that there are no mountains, rivers, cities or villages. This is a sign that the Orientals often have only one option, unlike the Occidentals who are always assigned more alternatives and options.

In this sample, the war between the Turks and Arabs is read as a war between Muslim countries. This would reinforce
that wars are usually initiated by Muslims or one side of the war must be an Islamic state. This is in accordance with the idea that when a particular culture or a group of people has little respect for another culture or a group of people then the language for expressing ideas will be reflected in the same way (Reah, 1998, p. 55). In this respect, the students' beliefs and values will be reinforced by the way the language constructs events or situations around them. The lexical and grammatical structures of this passage imply that there is an emphasis on the active role the Arabs are taking in the war against the Turks. However, the role of Europe is reduced and presented discursively in only one short sentence. Furthermore, the activities of the Arabs and the Turks are detailed, yet the activities of the other agent ‘Europe’ are absent as if only the former are interested and eager to be engaged in wars. This could mean that the passage is only interested in representing discursively the violence that occurred in the Middle East and not interested in the war that took place in Europe. Such discursivity would reinforce the negative attitude that the East is a barbaric, inhumane and uncivilised place.

The Arabs were controlled by Western powers up to the 1960s in some cases and the ‘freedom’ mentioned in the passage was never gained even though the Arabs were allies of the Western powers during the Arab-Turkish war. For instance, Libya was under Italian occupation, Jordan was under British occupation and Algeria was under French occupation. Driving the Turks out of the Arab World did not guarantee the liberation of the Arab World. Some of the facts which are hidden in this text are that Libya took its independence in 1951 and Jordan was an independent state only in 1946 (Nydell, 2002). Thus, there is a historical gap in which the west was a key player in that part of the world. The authors did not mention the fact that the Arabs fought the French, the Italians and the British to gain their liberty. When these western powers were forced to leave their Arab colonies (regardless how), the Arabs were still controlled physically, mentally, militarily, economically, politically and intellectually up to the present day (Said, 1978). Therefore, it might be asked that what kind of freedom the Orient gained and to what extent the Arab countries govern themselves. In practice, as many would think, including myself, the Arabs are still controlled by external powers who manifest discursively their ideological and hegemonic practices upon the former.

It is stated in the passage that ‘Our people wanted to be free. ... Now, all Arab countries govern themselves, but in those days none of them did’. The use of the present simple tense in the first part of the second sentence reinforces the disposition that the Arabs actually govern themselves and their people live in a free society. In addition, it often constructs discursive practices as true and self-evident. As mentioned earlier, the use of the inclusive expression ‘all’, as Hyatt (2005, p. 48) maintains barely provides accurate information. Furthermore, in this context, underlining the questionability of Arab freedom, Western powers such as the United States of America, France, the United Kingdom and Italy supported the Libyan Revolution by all means including militarily. The same countries supported the Tunisian and the Egyptian revolutions. Therefore, this supports Said’s (1978) argument that what has been written about the Orient is full of lies and myths. On the other hand, such descriptions of the Arabs, where the Other is fixed and unchanging
(see the Orientalism section), does not fit into the discourse of Post-colonialism which claims that the Other is in constant and unpredictable flux.

Another omission, and probably the most vital one, is the omission of any reference to Palestine. The Palestinians live in a relatively small geographical area with their freedom being controlled more than the other Arabs across the Arab world (and where the occupiers of Palestinian land are obvious (i.e. the Israelis) whilst other Arabs’ colonisers are not seen in the same way). This text reflects the Western mainstream media discourse which does not recognise Palestine as an occupied country. It also construes Palestine as if it does not exist or belong to the international community in general and Arab world in particular. Such inexistence has been found in real life in a study conducted by Adir Cohen on how children in Israel see, portray and perceive Arab Palestinians. He found out that ninety percent of the students believe that Palestinians have no rights whatsoever to the land in Israel or Palestine (Multiworld, 2003).

This is a type of ignorance that is associated with the Occidental perception of Orientals. In addition, the passage could be attributed to “the Orientalist view that Arab culture had “degraded” to an age of “decadence” under the Ottomans” (Massad, 2007, p. 8) as the Arabs, in this sample, only obtained their freedom when they rid themselves of the Turks. Influenced by the Orientalist judgment of the Arabs, some of the Arab writers claimed that the Ottoman rule resulted in “backwardness, decadence, moral decline, irrationality, and most of all, degeneration,” in the Arab world (Massad, 2007, p. 8).

Palestine’s land was given away by the British to the Zionists in 1948. It is clear that this news has not been communicated fairly and is biased when it comes to the Palestinian crisis. However, someone would not expect that such an issue would be missing from an educational discourse such as English language textbooks used in Libya. Such omission reinforces the fact that textbooks are not neutral but biased against certain practices and ethnicities. In this context, “events and ideas are not communicated neutrally because they are transmitted through the medium [of English language]” (Fowler, 1991, p. 25) as the injustice is enacted upon both Palestine and the Palestinians themselves especially with the visibility of the conflict between the occupier and the occupied. What can be noted from the passage is the Arabs fought the Turks for a good reason (the so-called ‘freedom’) even though the former are seen as “never having good reason to commit violence and are thus irrational, while [the West] would never be irrational enough to commit violence without good reason” (Salaita, 2008, p. 6-7). Therefore, what has been produced discursively about the Arabs is not realistic and contradicts the passage as they may fight for something beneficial and vital in order to gain something which all human beings should have. It could be also questioned, regardless of the Arabs fighting against Turks for a good reason or not, that fighting for freedom is not over for the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular.

There is a key challenge that many Arab regimes face in their ability and willingness to implement certain reforms (Al-Omari, 2008) which might be manifested semiotically via imported textbooks. However, such a profound goal and promise for a so-called democratic and stable society might not be permitted for
inclusion in, by the authors’ institutions or the target institution, the Libyan English language textbooks. As such, the authors would not be able to speak out about the Arab dictators in such textbooks who ruled the Arabs for a long time and oppressed the rights, the voices and the dignity of their own citizens, for economic and political benefits. In this case, English language textbooks have failed to construct and present discursively the inequalities and injustices that exist in the world (Kubota, 1998) as they have failed to present the immense historical discourse from the passage of the Islamic Empire where the Islamic world was united. During that time, from several points of view, there was no occupation; instead, there was Islamic conquest. In this regard, the Arabs did not fight the Turks for their liberty; instead, they fought for the sake of the British, the French and the Italians.

What could be asked here is that whether such a passage would be included in the English language textbooks which are used in Turkey or Palestine. If so, what would be the reaction of the Turkish or Palestinian people in general and the Turkish and Palestinians intellectuals in particular? Such a piece of discourse would not fit into the Libyan teaching policy since it is stated clearly in the Libyan education policy that Libya supports so-called Arabism and the preservation of Arab rights, culture and identity (See Appendix I). It can be concluded in this section that there is a clear division between the Orientals and the Occidentals in this textbook in images and in language structures. In addition, the Orientals seem to be stuck in their primitive lives using primitive tools in order to cope with their life duties such as farming even though societies and communities do progress in many aspects and Orientals are no exception. Images and language structures do not often match each other where the lack of coherence between the text and the visual presentation is obvious. There are certain degrees of using structures and images for some events and situations where the Orientals can do nothing but watch or observe. The Orientals are discursively constructed falsely in the manner that certain facts are represented misleadingly such as the case of Palestine. The discursive omission of such facts reinforces the prejudice and the bias of English language textbooks.

6. Conclusion

This study supports the argument that there is a strong relationship between English language education and the manifestation of the dominant culture in real life. Thus, English language textbooks authors allocated the content of the textbooks to biased text and imbalanced representations of people. In line with this, the production of such materials should be done from the producers’ and the consumers’ perspectives in order to create and produce more balanced representations of people, culture and society.

This article comes out with certain suggestions which might be helpful to changing the current situation regarding English language textbooks. Most obviously, changes in the way the textbooks represent and construct peoples and their cultures should advance the idea of overcoming the dominance of certain ideological practices within such materials. In addition, stereotypical representations and misrepresentations need to be taken into account by raising awareness of their impact on the social and cultural beliefs in society in general and classroom settings in particular.
From a pedagogical perspective, textbooks that are produced outside the target culture reinforce popular stereotypical images and discursive practices by stigmatising cultures as monolithic, static and stagnant rather than as dynamic and progressive. In terms of classroom settings, teachers and language instructors need to be more cognisant of teaching cultural practices; especially those that devalue the target culture and those that may cause culture shock and distress for the learners. In addition, they need to avoid any ideological and stereotypical misrepresentations of various people and cultures by reducing the dominant practices that are spread throughout the current textbooks.

School materials are produced by intellectuals, who supposedly would reject any cultural prejudice (Cole, 1997), however, they tend to conceal or underestimate discursively the value of inequality and maintain that languages and cultures are ideologically driven. Thus, English language textbooks not only contribute to the construction of the ideal image of the target language and culture but also fail to question inequalities and injustices that exist in the world. In this case, this article might indeed increase teachers’ and learners’ awareness about the encapsulated ideological and cultural values and norms within the textbooks. Moreover, awareness of the influence of the culture of a dominant language is necessary because the long-term impact may lead to the fossilisation of attitudes and habits among students which would lead to a loss in confidence in their own language and culture.

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Works Cited


Appendix: I The Principles of the Libyan Education System.

1- To enable students to understand Islamic values derived from the Koran (the Holy book of Muslims).

2- To develop the students’ sense of national belonging, and deepen their pride in the Arab nation and Islamic world civilization.

3- To develop the students’ sense of belonging geographically, historically to the African continent.

4- To enable the students to acquire the appropriate knowledge of skills and positive attitudes and cultural and social values appropriate to the needs of the students, and the needs and civilisation aspirations of the society.

5- To help students understand and recognise the world as a global human society associated with it, and having interest in its progress and evolution.

6- To develop the students’ capacity to interact with other cultures and open up to the world, qualifying them as citizens able to live positively and jointly in the global community.

7- To enable people with special needs, the gifted, disabled and distinct among them to enjoy educational opportunities appropriate to their abilities and needs.

8- Development of national sentiment among students and make them aware of the importance of their homeland and its role in building human civilisation.

9- To enable students to understand the principles of security and social peace and human rights, and encourage them to build a society of peace, a community of mutual understanding, dialogue and global tolerance, recognising their society’s rights within the international community and have great pride in their nation and its role in human civilisation.

10- Benefiting from the experience of other countries, especially those that have achieved tangible success in human development, while preserving the national identity and culture.

11- To link the curriculum content with the environment of the Libyan society and the technology surrounding the learner. Source (Saed & Abu Gania, 2004).