

Challenging the ‘Guise of Inclusivity’: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Third Lesson in the Grade 11 English Textbook

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Studies in L2 learning have highlighted the importance of designing inclusive pedagogies which capture the diversity of the L2 learner’s background in order to help the learner feel a sense of belonging in the language classroom and embrace the L2 learning process (Crawford, 1995; Herath, 2020; Greenup, 2020; López-Gopar, 2021 for instance). Thus, the ‘hidden curriculum’ of ESL textbooks should reflect this space created for learner inclusivity. In this regard, the lessons of the Grade 11 English textbook—designed to prepare students for the G.C.E. O/L Examination, the standardized government examination which grants students admission to the Advanced Level classes—at a glance, seem to capture the diversity of the L2 learner’s background as it is sprinkled with dialogues which feature an array of male and female interlocuters from different cultural backgrounds and include activities which can be related to the learner’s daily realities. However, the present study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)—an approach which, according to Van Dijk (1993), is used to analyze texts in order to discover what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role in the production or reproduction of unequal power relations (as cited in Jahedi, 2014, p.29)—and argues that the third lesson titled ‘Great Lanka’ in the Grade 11 English textbook perpetuates hegemonic ideologies related to language and culture in the guise of inclusivity. Thus, an analysis of the representation of interlocuters and nature of turn-taking in dialogues, the scope and content of reading passages, and the representation of visual texts establishes that diversity—in terms of gender and ethnicity—has only been included ‘for show’. Although the lesson appears to localize ELT materials by drawing from the ‘heritage’ of Lankan L2 learners, the study reveals that the ‘greatness’ of Lanka is unfortunately reduced to the patriarchal Sinhala Buddhist mainstream culture. Accordingly, this study provides important pedagogical implications for material developers as it highlights the importance of developing greater sensitivity when designing ELT materials in order to move beyond the guise of inclusivity and make pedagogical resources truly inclusive.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Inclusivity, Diversity, Ideology, Critical Discourse Analysis