



*Gender, Ideology and Power: Critical Discourse Analysis of High School  
EFL Textbooks in Iraq.*

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النوع الاجتماعي والأيدولوجية والسلطة: تحليل نقدي للخطاب في كتب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة  
أجنبية في المدارس الثانوية في العراق.

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## Abstract

This study explores the relations between language and ideology with respect to social gender and social power using critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a research method in three Iraq Textbooks in high school (English for Iraq, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades). Precisely, researchers analytically analyzed the way social power and identity based on gender were discursively represented in these EFL textbooks. In so doing , an overview of the relation of CDA to different theories and views of power and gender and their effects on students was presented in such a way that could help deliver the effectiveness of these terms on language learning in the EFL textbooks. The findings indicated that overt and covert messages within the examined EFL textbooks serve as a mechanism for perpetuating specific ideologies and interests, such as male dominance, patriarchy, sexism, and the idealized notion of English as spoken by native speakers. Additionally, these texts reinforce the subordination of women, disregarding individualism and achievement ideology.

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, ideology, power, gender, EFL textbooks

### المستخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة العلاقات بين اللغة والايديولوجية فيما يتعلق بالنوع الاجتماعي والسلطوية الاجتماعية باستخدام تحليل الخطاب النقدي كطريقة بحث في ثلاث كتب مدرسية عراقية في المدارس الثانوية (اللغة الانكليزية للعراق الصف الرابع والخامس والسادس). على وجه الخصوص قام الباحثون بدراسه تحليليه لطريقة التي تم بها تمثيل القوة الاجتماعية والهوية الاجتماعية على أساس الجنس في هذه الكتب المدرسية لتعليم اللغة الانكليزية كاللغة اجنبية. ومن خلال القيام بذلك تم عرض النظريات ووجهات النظر المختلفة حول السلطة والجنس وتأثيراتها على الطلاب بطريقة تحليل الخطاب النقدي التي تساعد في تحقيق فعالية هذه المسطلاحات في تعلم اللغة في الكتب المدرسية للغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية. إشارة النتاج ان الرسائل الظاهرة والباطنة في كتب تعليم اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية التي تم فحصها تعمل كآلية لادامة ايديولوجيات ومصالح محددة مثل هيمنة الذكور , والسلطة الابوية , والتميز الجنسي , والفكرة المثالية للغة الانكليزية كما يتحدث بها المتحدثون الاصليون بالإضافة الى ذلك تعزز هذه النصوص تبعية المرأة وتجاهل الفردية وايديولوجية تحقيق الاهداف

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي، الأيديولوجيا، السلطة، الجنس، كتب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

## **Introduction**

Critical discourse analysis CDA is considered as a form of discourse analysis rooted in social and critical theories. It observes language as a social exercise in which ideologies, social identities, and power associations are ordained and negotiated (Fairclough, 2013). Discourse is also viewed as a social site in which a fight for power and domination always occurs (Fairclough, 2013). This kind of discourse critically unlike other types of discourse due to its emphasis on uncovering the underlying motivations behind speech and delving deeper into the structure of discourse.

According to Wodak (2022), CDA which appeared from critical linguistics during the 1980s-1990s is known as an integrative and well-established restraint of language study and analysis. He also contends that the main purpose of CDA is to reveal and interrogate different ways in which oppression, discrimination, governor, dominance, power, and even ideology are established in discourse. Likewise, Fairclough (1989) argues that the most significant goal of Critical Discourse Analysis is to verify a common misinterpretation of the significance of language in not only the production and maintenance but also the change of social relations of power. CDA is mostly used as a useful research method in analyzing, exploring, and examining EFL textbooks. Most researchers conducted studies based on Fairclough's (1989) notion of dimension of meaning to distinguish how relational, empirical dimensions of meaning were created in EFL textbooks.

The concept of "Power" is being legitimized or de-legitimized in dialogs. Texts are frequently spots of social struggle in which they mark traces of divergent ideological fights for domination and control. Therefore, it focuses on the means by which linguistic formulae are used in different expressions and operations of

power. Power is expansively exerted not only by syntactic forms, nevertheless, by an individual's control of the social event using the sort of a text, or by the instruction of access to certain public domains. (Popitz, 1992 cited in Martin & Wodak, 2008) Empirical research conducted on the substances of EFL textbooks reveals that inequality and social power are signified through the exemplifications of power dynamics among different characters. According to Keshavarz and Malek (2009) and Taki (2008), characters in EFL textbooks, particularly those that are developed globally, are mostly represented as having identical social power relationships such as friends and colleagues. This fact specifically reflects the ideology in which equality in Western societies is highlighted. However, these depictions are only perfect images of interactions among individuals in different contexts that do not exist in real-life contexts (Baleghizadeh and Motahed, 2010: 17). Speech is realized as a means over which ideology is being replicated. Ideology herself is a theme of substantial importance in Critical discourse analysis. Hodge and Kress (1979) agreed the tone with their works. Later, van Dijk (1998) has founded a socio-cognitive notion of ideology.

Fiala (2007) described ideology as a collective perspective or mindset prevalent within a group or society. This perspective offers both a cognitive understanding of reality and a normative judgment on appropriate courses of action. According to frequent studies concerning gender exemplifications in EFL textbooks, the presence of gender is mostly an important key to reproducing, and perpetuating specific social identities and roles between men and women (Jannati, 2015; Harashima, 2005).

EFL textbooks, being theoretically variable and globally circulated, serve as potent vehicles for disseminating ideological, economic, and sociopolitical beliefs (Dendrinis, 1992). They often reflect specific Western interests and values, thus shaping learners' perceptions and understanding (Phillipson, 1992). Given that EFL textbooks typically dominate 90 percent of classroom teaching time, they are widely regarded as authoritative sources for language and cultural learning. However, recent research has revealed discrepancies between the language use depicted in textbooks and real-life contexts (Wen-Cheng et al., 2011). Consequently, EFL textbooks serve as crucial platforms for presenting and perpetuating notions of gender, ideology, and power, underscoring the need to consider their impact on EFL learners. Given the importance of understanding how language perpetuates inequality and reinforces hegemonic ideologies, this study aimed to investigate the demonstration of gender, ideology, and power in Iraqi high school EFL textbooks. The research questions guiding this inquiry are:

1. What aspects of ideologies can be found through high school EFL textbooks in Iraq?
2. How is social power and gender discursively represented in high school EFL textbooks in Iraq?
3. Is there any difference between the roles played by males and females in high school EFL textbooks in Iraq?

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

The study is conducted depending on Fairclough's (1989; 2013) dialectical relational method to CDA as a qualitative social study method since it suits exploring the research questions, research aims, and research problems. Fairclough's dialectical relational approach is well-suited to this study as it enables researchers to hypothetically explore the interaction between language and ideology, particularly regarding social power and identity, within three Iraqi English textbooks for high school EFL. This was achieved by analyzing the empirical, relational, and communicative aspects of meaning present in these textbooks, using the three systematic processes of depiction, clarification, and elucidation within CDA.

The study followed a qualitative research design aiming at understanding social and human issues, focusing on describing, interpreting, and explaining phenomena. Additionally, in analyzing gender, Porecca's (1984) approach was adopted, which involves examining conversations, listening dialogues, and readings for indicators, such as visibility, firstness, gender-neutral and specific nouns, and gender categorizes. Visibility discusses to the presence of female characters, both in text and illustration, while "firstness" indicates the frequency of male or female characters initiating conversations or appearing first in text lessons. Gender-neutral terms (e.g., teacher or person) and gender-specific terms (e.g., mothers or housewives) are counted, alongside instances of gender stereotypes (e.g., depicting a female character preparing dinner or a male character as an agent).

The current study aimed to analyze how discursive representations in three Iraqi high school EFL textbooks (English for Iraq) paradigm social power and identity depending on gender and race. However, Other difficulties or interrelationships, such as language and culture, are not within the scope of this investigation and can be explored in future studies.

## **Results**

This study focused on how “social power and identity” particularly concerning gender, are portrayed discursively over linguistic thought inside the explicit and implicit content of three EFL high school textbooks in Iraq. The study approved Fairclough’s (1989; 2013) “dialectical-relational approach to CDA as a qualitative social research method” Additionally, the methodology of Porecca’s (1984) was employed, which involved analyzing Visibility, firstness, gender-neutral and specific nouns, and gender stereotypes within conversations, listening dialogues, and reading passages. To unveil the depiction of social power and identity in terms of gender within the Iraqi EFL textbooks, a frequency analysis was conducted. This entailed calculating the frequency of appearance of masculine and feminine characters in photographic and oral texts, as well as examining the occurrence of masculinity and femininity nouns and pronouns in printed texts. Such frequency calculation formed an integral part of the description stage of the critical written analysis.

Table 1.

*Visibility of Male and Female Characters in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Textbooks*

Textbooks	Written texts		dialogues		Listening conversations	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Fourth grade	79	42	80	50	52	50
Fifth grade	80	47	82	56	58	49
Sixth grade	77	48	79	49	60	42

As can be seen in Table 1, males were far more visible than females in written texts, dialogues, and listening conversations. All the gender-linked nouns, names or titles, and pronouns in the three textbooks were calculated.

In the fourth-grade textbook, the written text featured 121 visible characters, encompassing both males and females. Of these characters, males accounted for 65.2% of visibility, with 79 male characters appearing in the text. In contrast, female visibility stood at only 34%. In dialogues, males occupied 61% of visibility, with both male and female characters appearing a total of 131 times. Females accounted for 41% of the total dialogue characters. In listening conversations, 102 characters were present, with males comprising 50% of visibility and females 49%. Moving on to the fifth-grade textbook, 127 visible characters, including both males and females, were depicted in written texts. Males occupied 63%



of character visibility, while females represented 37% of the total characters. In dialogues, 138 characters were observed (males and females), with males occupying 59.4% of the visibility while females were visible at 40% of the total. In listening conversations, 104 characters were visible, with women representing 55%.

Regarding the sixth grade, in written texts, 125 characters were visible throughout the book. Of these, 61% were males and 38% were females. Similarly, in dialogues, 128 characters (both males and females) appeared, with 61% being males and 38% females. In listening conversations, 102 characters were present, with 58.8% being males and females accounting for 41%. The result displayed an **outstanding inequity**, male **referents** seriously outnumbered females. Out of the 127 characters mentioned in the text, 37% were females, while 63% were males.

Male characters in the analyzed textbooks were notably more visible and assumed more active roles than their female counterparts. They appeared in 63% of dialogues involving characters, and the majority of participants in listening conversations and task exercises were males. This observation is not surprising, given that several conversations exclusively involved male characters.

The analysis exposed that masculine names and pronouns were referenced in the printed texts throughout the entire textbook at a rate of 78%. Conversely, female names and pronouns were mentioned at a lower rate of 22% in these printed texts. The researcher tallied each name once within each reading passage and action item.

Table 2.

*Firstness of Male and Female Characters in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Textbooks*

Textbooks	Written text		dialogues		Listening conversations	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Fourth grade	60	40	70	43	66	40
Fifth grade	55	36	60	40	55	30
Sixth grade	50	44	55	30	60	40

Men predominantly initiated conversations in written texts, dialogues, and listening conversations. While there was no significant difference in who initiated speech in the dialogues within the textbooks, it was notable that the initiator tended to have more speaking turns.

Regarding "firstness" in speech initiation, the individual who begins the conversation typically holds the conversational floor and speaks more than the other participant(s). In the fourth-grade textbook, males initiated speech in written texts 60% of the time, while females initiated speech 40% of the time. In dialogues, males initiated speech 61% of the time out of 113 instances, while females initiated speech only 35% of the time. In listening conversations, males began speech 62% of the time, while females initiated speech 37% of the time.

Regarding the sixth grade textbooks, in written text, the males occupied 53% while females had 46%. In dialogues, males were more dominant than women at a rate of 65%. In listening conversations, males appeared to have 60%, while females occupied 40%. In listening conversations, males initiated speech approximately 64% of the time, while females accounted for 35% of speech initiation instances.

In the sixth-grade textbooks, males were represented in the written text 53% of the time, while females appeared 46% of the time. Within dialogues, males occupied 65% of the dialogue space, while females were present in 35% of instances. In listening conversations, males were involved 60% of the time, while females participated 40% of the time.

Table 3.

*Speech Turns of Male and Female Characters in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Textbooks*

Textbooks	Written text		dialogues		Listening conversations	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Fourth grade	30	20	40	25	40	20
Fifth grade	33	19	41	28	44	19
Sixth grade	37	22	50	30	40	25

In the fourth-grade English textbooks, males took more turns in written texts, accounting for 60%, while females took 40% of turns. In dialogues, males dominated with 62% of turns, compared to females with 38%. In listening conversations, males occupied 67% of turns, leaving females with 31%.

Regarding fifth-grade English textbooks, males took the lead in written texts with 63% of turns, leaving females with 37%. In dialogues, males held 59% of turns, while females claimed 41%. However, in listening conversations, females took only 30% of the turns.

Moving on to the sixth-grade English textbooks, males continued to dominate. In written texts, they claimed 63% of turns, while females had 37%. In dialogues, males held 63% of turns, compared to females with 38%. Similarly, in listening conversations, males took 61% of turns, while females had only 38%. This pattern indicates that across all learning materials, males tend to have more speaking turns than females. This highlights the social authority typically afforded to males over females.

Table 4. *Gender Neutral Nouns in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Textbooks*

Textbook	Student	Person	Family	Teenager	Traveler	Guest
Fourth grade	45	40	30	20	6	3
Fifth grade	40	30	36	17	7	9
Sixth grade	50	26	20	15	10	6

The entire number of appearances of gender-neutral nouns was counted in the dialogues, written texts, readings, and the listening conversations. The consequences are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.

*Gender Specific Nouns in 4th, 5th, and 6th Grade Textbooks*

Textbooks	Girl	Boy	Men	Women	Waiter
Fourth grade	20	15	13	15	7
Fifth grade	17	14	14	16	5
Sixth grade	16	13	20	19	9

Out of the total number of characters referenced by names, which was 45, 20 (or 44%) were females and 25 (or 56%) were

males. Meanwhile, personal pronouns were used in reference 62 times, with 29 instances (or 46%) referring to females and 33 instances (or 53%) referring to males. Pronouns such as "we," "you," or "they," when applied to both males and females, were excluded from the count.

Several professions were stated in the textbooks, but those who are gender specific were performers, actresses, housewives, and cowgirls. Other professions, such as movie producers and teachers, were quantified in a way that the gender is unidentified. For instance, doctors appeared twice in the dialogues, once as a male character and once as a female character.

The English for Iraq textbooks feature a diverse array of characters portraying various occupations. However, the number of female characters depicted in these roles is significantly lower than that of male characters. Table 6 provides a numerical summary of the representation of males and females in different types of occupations.

Table 6.

*Male and Female Occupations in 4th, 5th, and 6th Grade Textbooks*

occupations	4th preparatory		5th preparatory		6th preparatory	
	male	female	male	female	male	female
driver	4	0	1	0	5	0
painter	5	1	4	2	4	0
director	3	0	2	1	3	1
agent	5	0	3	0	4	1

Detective	1	0	1	0	0	0
Computer scientist	2	0	2	0	3	1
Archaeologist	3	0	1	0	3	0
Hunter	1	0	1	0	2	0
Correspondent	1	0	1	1	0	0
Writer	3	0	2	1	4	1
Teacher	5	2	1	1	4	2
Hairdresser	4	3	2	0	2	2
Flight attendant	2	1	1	0	2	0
TV Presenter	3	1	1	0	4	1
Actor \ Actress	3	1	1	0	2	1
Journalist	3	2	1	0	2	2
Businessman	4	0	1	0	3	0
policeman	3	0	1	0	3	0
Optician	0	0	1	0	1	0
Beggar	0	0	1	0	0	0
singer	2	0	0	1	1	0
Playwright	3	1	8	0	2	0
Magician	0	0	1	0	0	0
Motorcycle Racer	2	0	1	0	2	1

Weightlifter	1	0	1	0	1	0
Basketball player	1	0	1	0	0	0
Football player	2	0	3	0	0	0
Total	66	12	46	15	57	13

As can be seen, among the 61 working characters mentioned in the fifth preparatory textbook, only 15 were females, while the remaining 46 were males, indicating a ratio of 3 males for every female represented in the workforce. The data suggests that male characters occupy a wide range of occupations, whereas there was a lack of occupational diversity for women. Females were typically depicted in traditional parts, such as teachers, flight attendants, and hair stylists. All references to the occupation of the playwright were associated with men, implying that it is perceived as a profession exclusively for men. Similarly, all sport-related occupations were depicted as male-only, suggesting that only males were seen as having the right to engage in sports. In contrast, references to hair stylists exclusively featured women, reinforcing the stereotype that this profession was solely for females. Furthermore, there were no female representations as news presenters, bus or car drivers, detectives, computer experts, archaeologists, hunters, reporters, opticians, dramatists, or magicians. Additionally, there were no female characters depicted as working in the police force or business roles.

In the EFL textbooks (4th, 5th, and 6th) Preparatory, an investigation was conducted into the inclusion of written, visual, and oral texts featuring notable and influential individuals. These



individuals, ranging from authors to scientists to architects, have been depicted as having contributed to the development of human society in various ways. In the 4th preparatory EFL textbook, for instance, the mention of famous poets predominantly features male figures, such as Abd-ALWahab, W.B. Yeats, and Maruf AL-Rissafie, with only one female poet, Nazik AL Malaeake, being mentioned. Details about their lives, notable works, and excerpts from their best poems were provided. This tendency to predominantly feature male poets may convey the impression that poetry is primarily associated with males, despite the potential inclusion of an equal number of notable female poets.

Similarly, in the 5<sup>th</sup> preparatory textbook, only male characters and influencers were highlighted, such as the famous journalist George Kurdahi and the renowned actor Mr. Gregor. These mentions occurred in various lessons, such as “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” and “Different Opinion,” where discussions about films, including “The Spanish Captain” directed by Pedro Gariaca and David William, took place. Despite the existence of many notable female actors, the focus on male figures may serve to diminish the female perspective and voice within the media society. The only mention of a woman was Widad AL Orfali in a lesson titled “A Famous Iraqi Artist,” where she was described simply as an artist or painter, potentially suggesting a lack of acknowledgment of significant contributions by women to humanity. Therefore, men are portrayed as influential, knowledgeable, and contributory, with their presence being more prominent and frequent compared to women, who are mentioned rarely and in less significant contexts. This difference in portrayal suggests that to be an powerful person is more commonly connected with maleness than with femininity in these textbooks.

Thus, the textual portrayal of male and female individuals appears to be markedly distinct.

## **Conclusion**

The current study comes up with the following conclusions depending on the previous textual analysis. The critical textual analysis of the three Iraqi textbooks for learning the English language conducted in this study identifies the prevalence of the Social Effectiveness ideology, which posits the primary goal of education is to encounter the requirements of society. School book designers and instructors who implement this philosophy view the syllabus as a tool that formulates students to be active members of society and supports the vision that school is the place where learners are prepared for expressive adult social life. Learning English Language syllabus is full of language devices and ideologies. Students in foreign language classrooms deal with social laden spoken and non-spoken social practices. As Ritchhart (2015) observes, the profounder association of a word and structure implicitly influence thought and behavior. Therefore, EFL textbooks are not neutral but rather driven by social considerations. This addresses the first research question regarding the presence of ideologies in Iraqi high school EFL textbooks. It is clear that the textbooks address the social aspect of ideologies, this means the social reconstruction ideology was dominant in EFL textbooks in Iraq.

The argument posits that EFL textbooks function as covert mechanisms for the discursive dissemination and perpetuation of precise ideologies, power crescendos, social identities, and positioning. These textbooks mirror the ideology, practice, value, and worldview prevalent in Iraqi society. They secretly serve to reinforce the existing social order and replicate the hegemonic

power structures and ideologies of the society. These ideologies encompass patriarchy, male dominance, sexism, and the marginalization of women. Additionally, they encompass conceptualizations of students as human capital, meritocracy, individualism, the ideology of achievement, in addition to the neoliberal redefinition of liberty, democracy, and fairness.

A great difference can be seen in the parts played by males and females in the mentioned textbooks. Men are depicted as occupying effective and important roles, portraying superiority, social influence, and authority as playing a great role in social life. However, females are not embodied in a way that calls their actual social roles in life. In spite of the presence of females in social life and precisely the workplace, they are portrayed as less visible than males in text and conversations. Concerning job-related roles females are employed less and are located in limited job positions stimulating traditional women's occupations. In contrast, males, enjoy a varied choice of occupations. Both men and women are portrayed in stereotypical roles that diminish the occurrence of females. This addresses the third research question regarding the difference between the roles played by males and females in high school EFL textbooks in Iraq.

It is evident that the dominant theme across the three high school textbooks is cultural references, despite the definition of culture as "a set of attitudes, values, norms, traditions, and aims that particularize a definite group," as affirmed by Tomlinson and Sousa (2011, p. 141). Numerous linguists emphasize the strong relationship between language and culture, advocating for the integrated study of language and culture to fully grasp the meaning conveyed by words, phrases, or idiomatic expressions with identifiable cultural components (Driscoll, 1999, cited in Shreeb,

2017). Furthermore, Betti and AL-jubouri (2015) assert that in learning a foreign language, it is essential to be mindful of the differences between the culture of one's mother tongue and that of the target language, particularly regarding aspects such as family environment, taboos, physical proximity and contact, and manners of eating, selling, buying, and greeting. This approach can facilitate students' understanding of the complete meaning or purposes of linguistic forms in the target language.

“Iraq EFL” textbook has some prominent features, for instance, the teacher’s book comprises guides about how the book can be used to the greatest advantage of the students. The activities incorporate individual couples and group work. It also replicates a multi-skills syllabus, and it manages to mix the four language abilities without ignoring other essential aspects of ELT such as word development. With respect to content, the content of the book is generally truthful. Moreover, it is exciting, challenging, and motivating. There are adequate varieties in the topic and content of the textbook.

Researchers can study the psychological influence of the gender discriminations presented in the textbooks on the students. This can be studied through using psychological theories. Another study can be done about the Iraqi social culture and its influence on students’ curriculum as it is noticed in the current study. Also, the presence of the political effects in the syllabus studied in the Iraqi schools.

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