

BIOGRAPHY OF AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK IN KENYA: A JOURNEY FROM CONCEPTUALIZATION TO THE CLASSROOM

RESEARCH DETAIL

Gray (2006) first applied the circuit of culture (du Gay et al., 1997) to the global ELT textbook in his PhD thesis titled *A Study of Cultural Content in the British ELT Global Coursebook: a Cultural Studies Approach*. The 'circuit of culture' attempts to explain how artefacts come to possess meaning through an examination of five cultural processes or "moments": representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation.

In textbook research, representation examines how the textbook is encoded with certain meanings. Gray (2006, 2010) examines cultural contents in global ELT textbooks. My choice of textbook arises from a preliminary survey among secondary school teachers of English in Kenya (2009). Textbooks may be examined from various angles. They are concurrently politico-economic products (Apple, 1989), as well as curriculum and cultural artefacts (Dendrinis, 1992). I take the view that the circuit of culture is a powerful model and that the representation moment is flexible enough to cater for an analysis of various types of content within textbooks. I adopt Littlejohn's (1992, 1998) framework in my examination of textbook content from a pedagogical perspective. This orients my study towards a view of the textbook as a curriculum product.

Regulation examines how political, economic or other factors regulate the circulation of meanings while production examines how the artefact is designed, produced and marketed (Gray, 2006). Gray examines these two moments in tandem and draws from an analysis of guidelines for authors from four major British ELT publishers as well as interviews with 2 publishing managers and 2 senior editors from an ELT publisher. My interpretation of regulation flows from my TESEP orientation, where textbooks are responsive to the national syllabus, adherence to which plays a significant role in gaining the desired MoE approved status for use in public schools. As such, my regulation moment is characterized by interviews with participants from the curriculum development body (the Kenya Institute of Education), and an analysis of the syllabus which is informed by various key works (Dubin & Olshtain; 1986; Breen, 1987; Nunan, 1988; White, 1988; Richards, 2001), and more recently, Graves (2008) who explores a "post-syllabus" point of view. My producer participants include the publishing manager, editor and four authors, with whom I held interviews.

In the 'consumption moment', Gray (2006, 2010) includes 22 Barcelona based teachers of English who focus on the examination of cultural contents in the global ELT textbook. I include 16 teachers, primarily drawn from my survey participants, who indicated that they use *Head Start*. These teachers explain both their textbook selection experiences and their perceptions of *Head Start* within the milieu of choice that exists following liberalization of the textbook market. In attempting to include aspects of textbook research that have been less investigated, I also include 155 learners whose questionnaire responses provide a profile of learners and their aspirations, and use of English. My main focus, however, is on learners' textbook perceptions, arising from their metaphors (McGrath, 2006). My learner sample arises from classroom observation of 4 lessons in which *Head Start* was used. In this way, I include a "materials-in-action" (Littlejohn, 1992, 1998) perspective to the consumption moment within this textbook biography. In so doing, I examine this moment from a language education perspective much more fully than has been done previously.

Representations lead to identities. The identity moment examines the social identities and lifestyles associated with the artefact (Gray, 2006). It is closely related to the representation moment and Gray examines the two moments together. In my study, I note that du Gay et al (1997) observe that artefacts such as the Walkman not only reflect user identities but also become signifiers in constructing such identities. I make inferences about *Head Start* arising at the representation moment, thus making suggestions about what it stands for, based on my framework for analysis. As I journey round the other moments, some of these perceptions get further explained and reinterpreted by participants' own characterization of the materials. I therefore revisit the identity moment at the end of my study in view of the overriding perceptions of the materials arising from all moments, and what it reveals about participant perceptions and textbook practices.

The textbook under study was conceptualized, produced and consumed within a changing/innovative TESEP (Holliday, 1994) educational publishing context. Change was characterized mainly by the development of a national policy on textbooks (1998) and curriculum review (2002). The 1998 policy presents guidelines for educational publishing within the liberalized market, while the syllabus reflects changes following scheduled (10-year) curriculum review. I revisit the notion of textbook as agent of change (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994) in view of my conceptualization to consumption view of textbook development within this TESEP context.