Örebro University
Department of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences English

The Portrayal of the Other: A Postcolonial Perspective on Three ESL Textbooks in Swedish Upper Secondary School

Author: Lovisa Sädbom

19940811

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Supervisor: Dr. Jenny Bonnevier

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate three English as a second language (ESL) textbooks used for English 6 in Swedish upper secondary school from a postcolonial perspective, answering the following research question: Who is the implied reader, based on assumptions of the expected experiences and culture, and what and who is constructed as deviant or Other? To examine these questions, the study employs critical discourse analysis and implements strategies from multimodal analysis. The analysis is concerned with matters such as what is constructed as familiar or unfamiliar to the student, what images are chosen, and what those images convey. The study shows that the implied reader is expected to align with Western culture and experiences in two of the textbooks. In the third, the implied reader has no ethnic markers at all. Further findings show several cases where non-Western cultures are depicted as deviant, both in texts and images. Therefore, I emphasize that it is important that teachers are aware of how different cultures are depicted in the materials they choose to use in their classroom to be able to prevent reproduction of harmful stereotypes and portrayals of non-Western cultures that do not align with the fundamental values of the Swedish school.

Keywords

Textbook analysis; Postcolonial studies; Cultural studies; ELT materials; Representation

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Introduction

As future teachers, we must consider that values, whether we want to or not, permeate everything we do, everything we teach, and everything we read together with our students. It is part of the teaching mission to consistently discuss current societal matters of inequality and oppression with students when such events occur and ensure that those values align with the values emphasized in the curriculum. Swedish people generally perceive ourselves as open-minded, progressive, and politically correct, with values rooted in democracy and equality. However, these values do not stop us from overlooking unjust actions—however big or small—towards marginalized groups. A clear demonstration of ethnic hierarchy can be seen as currently, Ukraine is under attack by Russia. Millions of refugees are on their way to safer countries in Europe, one of them being Sweden. Here a united general public embraces them and does our best to welcome them—as we should—but merely reluctantly, if at all, welcoming the refugees of Syria and Afghanistan into our society.

It may be needless to say that it is fundamental that teachers and adults in school consistently advocate equal human rights. By discussing events of a larger scale and ones of a smaller scale with our students, we contribute to how our society thinks, talks, and engages in matters that deal with questions of equality for marginalized groups. I believe that small things such as naive and uninformed assumptions of Swedish society play an important role in constructing the experiences of groups being excluded in different ways based on race, ethnicity, and religion. One domain with a particular responsibility to act counterweight toward that kind of exclusion is Swedish schools, from which fundamental democratic values shall permeate all education, teaching materials included.

However, those fundamental values may come off as contradictory. For example, it is stated in the curriculum that the education shall represent and impart values in "överensstämmelse med den etik som förvaltats av kristen tradition och västerländsk humanism sker detta genom individens fostran till rättskänsla, generositet, tolerans och ansvarstagande" 'in accordance with the ethics carried by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is done by nurturing the individual's sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility'[1] (Skolverket, 1). This phrasing implies that other cultures and traditions are not carriers of such values; it underpins a democratic, good, Western Christian we, as opposed to an unnamed Other. Further, there is an expectation of education to carry the ethics

[1] All translations of quotations from the national curriculum are mine.

of Christian tradition although claiming in the following sentence that the "Undervisning ska vara icke-konfessionell" 'education shall be non-denominational' (1).

When it comes to the English subject and what is said regarding cultures, it is stated in the syllabus and the purpose of the English subject that "Eleverna ska ges möjlighet att utveckla förståelse av livsvillkor, samhällsfrågor och kulturella förhållanden i olika sammanhang och områden där engelska används" 'Students shall be given the opportunity to develop their understanding of living conditions, societal issues and cultural conditions in different contexts and areas where English is used' (Skolverket 1). A similar phrasing is found in the core content of English 6, where it is stated that the content of communication shall include "samhällsfrågor, sociala, kulturella, politiska och historiska förhållanden samt värderingar i olika sammanhang och områden där engelska används, även i jämförelse med egna erfarenheter och kunskaper" 'social issues and social, cultural, political and historical conditions as well as values in different contexts and areas where English is used, also in comparison to their own experience and knowledge' (Skolverket 5). What is notable here is the emphasis on comparing students' own experience and knowledge. It may seem harmless but could lead to students' general thinking and understanding of an "us" and "them". One part of challenging that sort of thinking, besides teacher input, is the teaching materials that are used in the classroom.

According to Niklas Ammert in *Att spegla världen: Läromedelsstudier i teori och praktik 'Reflecting the World: Teaching Materials Studies in Theory and Practice'*, the purpose of textbooks is to transfer content that aligns with, on the one hand, the curriculum and, on the other, the needs of teachers and students. Moreover, textbooks mirror the society they were produced in and are a part of (28). Further, he emphasizes the extensive usage of textbooks in Swedish schools, especially by teachers with short education or no education at all. Additionally, Ammert points toward statistics showing that Swedish adolescents generally are less critical of textbooks and their content than the average European student (27).

The lack of students' critical awareness demands that teachers take responsibility for the materials used in their classroom; this includes aspects of representation and assumptions. Throughout my education, I have always felt unrefectedly comfortable and 'at home', not ever being forced to align with any other culture than the one I consider myself a part of, a privileged position that not all students have been in. I want to clarify that this privilege could influence the result of my analysis; a different subject position might have identified further damaging assumptions in the same texts.

In this degree project, I have chosen to analyze ESL textbooks because although they overtly conform with the Swedish schools' fundamental values of democracy and equal human rights, they may include unexamined assumptions based on hegemonic understandings of what it is to be Swedish. The analysis is builds on a postcolonial perspective, intending to examine what experiences and identities are left out and what cultural aspects are depicted as "us" and Other. My research questions are: Who is the implied reader, based on assumptions of the expected experiences and culture, and what and who is constructed as deviant or Other?

Background

In this section, I initially present and discuss previous studies of textbooks regarding portrayals of culture made both in Sweden and internationally. After that, I define the key concepts this project draws on: postcolonialism, ideology and discourse. Following this, the theoretical framework is presented which centers around the approach of postcolonial critical discourse analysis, and implements strategies used in multimodal critical discourse analysis. Lastly, two more key concepts are defined: hegemony and Othering.

Previous research

When it comes to research on textbooks used in Sweden, there is a range of studies of textbooks made with an intersectional focus. The Swedish National Agency for Education published a report in 2006 called *I enlighet med skolans värdegrund? En granskning av hur etnisk tillhörighet, funktionshinder, kön, religion och sexuell läggning framställs i ett urval av läroböcker 'In Alignment with Fundamental Values? A Study of How Ethnicity, Disabilities, Gender, Religion, and Sexual Orientation Are Portrayed in a Selection of Textbooks*. Regarding ethnicity in particular, a study by Therese Karlsson is presented. She examined 63 textbooks, intending to chart descriptions and images of Sami culture and people and analyze the values included in that portrayal (Runblom 11). She found that half of those 63 textbooks did not include their existence at all. Clearly, the lack of representation does not align with either the fundamental values of Swedish education or the core content.

In international research, cultural representation in textbooks has been widely studied. In *Culture in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Textbooks: A Semiotic Approach*, Csilla Weninger and Tamas Kiss refer to several studies published in the 1990s, which were all occupied with the cultural content in language teaching materials as a result of a public debate on the matter (698). They state that most studies have taken a critical orientation and looked further into cultural representations as evident in the textual or visual materials included, often

by applying quantitative or qualitative tools, sometimes both (695). Before introducing an expanded, semiotic approach to cultural content in textbooks, they conclude that the critical studies, according to Su and Liu, "provided invaluable insight into how dominant political and cultural ideologies surface in visual and textual content and problematized the role of EFL as an instrument of hegemony" (qtd. in Weninger and Kiss 695). Further, Weninger and Kiss observe that more studies of the same sort have emerged in recent years, many approaching locally produced materials (698). Two studies of that sort that have been relevant to this project are carried through in *The Representation of Foreign Cultures in English Textbooks* by Ka-Ming Yuen and *Rethinking Under-represented Ethnicities in ELT Materials Through Critical Discourse Analysis-oriented Model* by Sergio Durand. Both are interested in how cultures are depicted in materials intended for ESL teaching, which has inspired the research questions, and to some extent, the method of this project. Yuen studies cultural representation in ESL teaching materials, although more quantitative in its approach than my project. Yuen's study takes a content analysis approach concerned with the frequency of foreign cultures portrayed compared to English-speaking countries. He finds that "As evidenced in other studies, the content on foreign culture in textbooks is fragmented and stereotypical" (7) and that "In terms of the breadth of foreign cultures represented in these textbooks, an obvious imbalance occurs" (7). Durand's study, which builds upon critical discourse analysis, deals with culture and Othering. The study identifies several forms of Othering in ESL teaching materials used globally. Many of the textual examples that are found reveal Western individuals participating in acts that position them as 'white saviours' and self-appointed experts in cultures they are not part of themselves. For example, one form of Othering is identified in a text discussing the number of words the Inuit group has for 'snow', having an American linguist conjecturing on the matters instead of someone simply asking an Inuit (Durand 4).

Although the field is well researched, there is a gap of studies with an explicit, critical, postcolonial approach to ESL textbooks used in Sweden in particular, which this study aims to fill.

Theoretical framework and key concepts

As mentioned, this study is based on a postcolonial, critical approach. A definition of the term postcolonial may be necessary since it varies in different domains. According to *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, postcolonialism "deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies" (Ashcroft et al. 204) and is described as a term whose initial

primary purpose was to be used in contexts of literary criticism and has been since the late 1970s (204). However, the term is now used in a wider sense to examine the effects of European colonialism (204). Ania Loomba expands this definition further in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*; she argues that since "the age of colonialism is over, and because the descendants of once-colonized peoples live everywhere, the whole world is postcolonial" (28). Simultaneously, she adds, the prefix of the word—post—implies two things: firstly, that the times of colonialism are behind us, and secondly, that the ideology behind colonialism, too, is left in the past. The latter is a common subject of criticism of the term: "if the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased, it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism" (28). Further, she argues that the term appears to be "riddled with contradictions and qualifications" (32), pointing toward anti-colonial movements that have failed to include changes for women and the working class in colonized countries, claiming that versions of colonialism can be duplicated from within (32). The provided solution is to rather consider postcolonialism as something that does not take place immediately after colonialism and that it does not claim that colonialism in any sense is 'over'. It should be understood "as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba 32). While this project builds upon a postcolonial discourse—and therefore certainly contests these colonial legacies—my foremost intention is to ask questions about the implied reader by examining assumptions in texts and images.

In *Language and Power*, Norman Fairclough discusses conventional assumptions that can be revealed in linguistic interactions and how closely linked they are to ideology: "the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language" (2). He argues that ideology is "pervasively present in language" and points out that no one who has an interest in "relations of power in modern society, can afford to ignore language" (3). Therefore, ideology has a connection with the term discourse, which is crucial in postcolonial criticism; by OED defined as "a spoken or written treatment of a subject in which it is treated or handled at length" (qtd. in Loomba 55) or "a strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known (Ashcroft et al. 83). When studying discourse, one is not only interested in what is being said but also in what is left out (Loomba 56).

In *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Fairclough approaches critical discourse analysis (CDA) and what it is meant to analyze. "It [CDA] is *not* analysis of discourse 'in itself'", Fairclough says, but rather the "dialectical *relations between* discourse

and other objects… as well as analysis of the 'internal relations' of discourse" (4). He states further that a challenge is to find ways to connect categories from discourse theory with categories from political theory (for example, discourse with hegemony) by assessing the 'match' between concepts from "different theories and frameworks, and move towards increasing it" (6). Beyond regular text analysis, critical discourse analysis adds an interdiscursive dimension, which targets the multiple discourses within the text itself, as well as a linguistic and multimodal analysis that enables linkage between what Fairchlough calls 'micro-analysis' of texts to "various forms of social… analysis of practices, organisations and institutions" (6-7).

When adding postcolonial theory to critical discourse analysis, it is possible to reveal power inequality in, for example, different elements of texts. It adds a framework for bringing aspects such as ethnicity, race, and the effects of colonial relations into focus. Language has the power to construct a subject: "no human could be seen as innocent. Any set of words could be analysed to reveal not just an individual but a historical consciousness at work. Words and images thus become fundamental for an analysis in historical processes such as colonialism" (Loomba 54-55).

In *Postcolonial Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* by R. Sanz Sabido, the theory and methods of postcolonial critical discourse analysis (PCDA) are presented. Both disciplines of postcolonial theory and CDA are "concerned with the concept of power, and through their own particular means, both seek to expose oppression and power inequalities" (19). Furthermore, the objective of PCDA is to explore the "ways in which postcolonial power relations are embedded in discursive practices" (26). By combining the two positions, it is possible to contextualize inequalities both historically and theoretically; therefore, a postcolonial approach should be "recognized as an essential tool" that can be applied to a variety of media formats, not limiting analysts to the study of literature alone (28). The critical perspective of PCDA is essential, she continues, as it does not strive to simply describe matters of power in discourse but question them:

> Thus, 'critical' refers to the critique (and not the description) of discourse, as well as the critique of the agents who produce the discourse with the purpose of reproducing and maintaining the existing unequal relations of power that favour them. In other words, critical scholars seek to expose the ways in which the interests of the powerful are protected and to defend the interests of those who suffer because of them (the powerless) (Sanz Sabido 31).

Since PCDA is committed to social critique, it thus "constantly sits on the fence between social research and political argumentation", according to Wodak and Meyer (qtd. in Sanz Sabido 31). External sources have argued that the lack of neutrality does not reflect good research practice, however the ideal of neutrality is problematic (32) and is rejected as untenable within this framework. Hence, the study of textbooks in this project points towards problematic formulations and assumptions –the focus in itself is not neutral as it derives from this critical, postcolonial perspective where I intend to analyze how marginalized groups are depicted.

Further criticism of CDA, presented by Toolan and Widdowson, consists of the "lack of a fixed methodological framework" (qtd. in Sanz Sabido 32). However, Sanz Sabido argues that methodological pluralism should rather be seen as positive due to the flexibility and opportunity for the researcher to adapt to each research object in question (32). In practice rather than theory, she describes specific criteria for analysis to count as PCDA: initially, research questions and assumptions are formulated with the postcolonial perspective in consideration. Further, the conclusions of a PCDA research project must "consider how the postcolonial connection is visible (or not) in the empirical findings" (Sanz Sabido 39).

Since my project is concerned with the choice of images that complement the text, as visual elements may communicate and reproduce stereotypes or assumptions, the analysis employs a critical multimodal approach. In *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*, visual texts are compared to children's fairytales by Machin and Thornborrow: "They may take place in the realm of fantasy but nevertheless they carry very real messages about evaluations of identities, ideas, values and actions with possible social consequences" (qtd. in Machin and Mayr 102). Choices made by communicators, including textbook writers, will never be neutral according to Machin and Mayr but "will be based on the way they wish to signpost what kind of person they are representing, or how they wish to represent them as social actors engaged in action" (103), allowing us "to place people in the social world and to highlight certain aspects of identity we wish to draw attention to or omit" (103).

The aspects of multimodal critical discourse analysis that will be applied to the method of this project are representational strategies in lexical and visual elements, as described in the chapter "Representing People: Language and Identity". The two most relevant strategies, that align with my PCDA framework, can be applied to analyze lexical elements in the textbooks and are: specification and genericisation, and pronoun versus noun. These strategies can be implemented in analysis of texts that discuss culture. For example, it is useful to look at how

people are represented as specific individuals or as a generic type – for instance, as demonstrated by Machin and Mayr, the case of the following heading in a newspaper: "A man, Mazar Hussein, challenged police today" or the choice "A Muslim man challenged police today" (81). The use of the generic category Muslims results in the story getting a racialized slant (81). The use of pronouns versus nouns could instead position the reader as belonging to a 'us' versus a collective, oppositional 'them' (Machin and Mayr 84). When it comes to the visual elements, other strategies can be implemented either by positioning the viewer in relation to the people inside the image by distance and angle or by individualization versus collectivization – in other words, what is interesting here is whether people are portrayed as individuals or part of a group, generic and specific depictions, and lastly, exclusion altogether (Machin and Mayr 96-102).

In contexts of discourse, language and power, the term hegemony is essential. Gramsci defines hegemony as "domination by consent" (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 134). This consent is achieved through subtleness, as the subjects who are disadvantaged in the hegemony (the subaltern) believe that the domination is in their interest. For example, imperial power over a colonized people can be achieved by Eurocentric values of "social order, stability and advancement" (Ashcroft et al. 134) being enforced, which leads the disadvantaged subjects to internalize these values and systems as their own while simultaneously not having the option to refuse, neither the interest for refusing – the domination is simply accepted. Hegemony as a concept is important to this project; although Sweden has had marginal colonial power, there can still be hegemonic ideas of what it means to be Swedish and what is and is not the cultural norm in society. Part of hegemonic Swedishness is a general reluctance to acknowledge any hints of a colonial past, which permeates society and therefore, inevitably, the school. This reluctance leads to systematic ignorance of a colonial aftermath, even if Swedes consider ourselves to be educated and aware of oppression of different sorts.

Another crucial concept to this project is Othering, which originates from postcolonial theory. It is an act that refers to "the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group" (Ashcroft et al. 188). In hegemony, the colonized—or marginalized—groups are generally the subjects experiencing 'Othering' by the acts of the colonizer. According to Loomba, the construction of groups as "inferior, or 'other', was crucial for constructing a European 'self' and justifying colonialist practices" (112). Based on Foucault's notion of discourse, Edward Said's *Orientalism* argues that knowledge of the 'Other' is constructed in specific ways in Western literature. For example, when the Middle East is pictured as "irrational, depraved…, childlike… "different"", "the European is rational,

virtuous, mature, “normal”” (62). This term is essential to my project since this study’s research question builds upon this concept.

To summarize, the framework of this project is based on concepts from postcolonial theory, such as hegemony and Othering, while drawing on a critical discourse analysis approach where the analysis is concerned with how ideology can be revealed in assumptions of the reader position by examining the discourse and what is being said and what is being left out. Further, multimodality and common lexical and visual strategies are used as tools for the analysis. In the following section of the essay, I intend to present the method of analysis and the materials I have chosen to examine.

Method and materials

In the analysis, I ask the textbooks the two research questions of this project: Who is the implied reader, based on assumptions of expected experiences and culture, and what and who is constructed as deviant or Other? What has been of interest is how value is assigned to different cultural aspects and what is assumed to be familiar or unfamiliar to this implied reader. A thorough reading of the three textbooks has been carried out to identify patterns of the implied reader and constructions of the Other. With the two questions presented in mind, I highlighted two separate categories: one where assumptions of the implied reader could be found, and one where discussions of non-Western cultures, their living conditions, and traditions could be found. In this project, my intention is to examine whether there are power inequalities or reproduction of a Self and an Other. Therefore, the method’s approach has been consistently critical when choosing lexical and visual elements to analyze. Throughout the essay, I continuously use the terms Western/non-Western to be able to point towards problematic portrayals related to certain cultural groups – not to reinforce hegemonic ideas about those groups.

The visual elements that have been chosen for analysis have been counted and divided into categories as the following: number of visual elements and number of elements depicting people appearing white/non-white. When it has not been possible to determine whether a person is white or non-white, the element has not been included in the statistics at all. The categorization is based on my reading of these images and my understanding of how they are read in a Swedish context. It does not reflect any idea of underlying objective categories of white/non-white but is meant to draw on this discourse in order to critique it. After that, I observed what the chosen elements portray and examined what they convey in relation to the

main literary texts they are meant to complement. The method has been applied to all textbooks I have chosen to examine.

The objects of my analysis are three ESL textbooks directed toward students taking the course English 6 in upper secondary school, which are written by experienced teachers. Specifically, what has been of interest in these textbooks is:

1) Texts whose purpose is to introduce novels, short stories, and texts of other genres.
2) Texts formatted as tasks for students to complete before or after reading.
3) Visual elements supporting the literary texts that are provided.

I will refer to the two first as 'surrounding texts and tasks' since they are meant for students to work with before or after reading what I will refer to as the main literary texts, such as Romeo and Juliet or a poem by Edgar Allan Poe. Generally, I do not examine the texts that form the main material, but I do discuss their topics since they affect the focus of the surrounding texts and tasks. Further, I discuss them when presented as a gathered cluster of texts that deals with specific topics. The reason for mainly examining the surrounding texts and tasks is that assumptions and reproduction of opinions of other cultures may be concealed there. They also position the implied reader in relation to the main literary texts in different ways, which makes them the place where we are most likely to find any assumptions about their identity. Lastly, my project is interested in the choice of images that complement the texts since I believe that visual elements may communicate hegemonic ideas and reproduce stereotypes or assumptions. Therefore, drawing on the PCDA approach, a multimodal analysis is done of images provided in the textbooks, where I investigate what the pictures portray and convey.

The textbooks this project examines are:

Title	**Publisher**	**Year of publication**
Blueprint: Version 2.0 B	Liber	2008
Solid Gold 2	Studentlitteratur	2015
Viewpoints 2	Gleerups	2018

A search in one of the largest Facebook forums for teachers of English in Sweden (Nätverk för lärare i engelska 'Network for Teachers of English') showed that these textbooks are often suggested as rigorous and appropriate for teaching ESL in upper secondary school. They are all published by large academically well-known publishing houses, the first published in 2008 and the last in 2018, ten years later. However, they are all used in schools nationwide today and are constructed to align with the core content stated in the syllabus of 2011.

Blueprint Version 2.0 B by Christer Lundfall, Ralf Nyström, Nadine Röhlk Cotting and Jeanette Clayton consists of 28 texts which are divided into six chapters: Love is in the Air, Reality Bites, How Far Would You Go?, Culture Clashes, 9 to 5, and Thrill and Suspense. All chapters but one include listening exercises, which have been included in my analysis, although I lack access to the actual sound files. This choice has been made as I, as mentioned, do not analyze the main literary texts included in the textbooks besides their topics, but rather focus on the surrounding texts and tasks. Throughout, the texts are introduced by a paragraph that either provides context or asks the student to imagine a scenario that will play out in the following text. After the student has read the text, they are asked to engage in the sections Read & React, Reflect & Share, and Word Work. The Reflect & Share-tasks generally ask the student to consider situations in the text they can relate to and share with a friend, suggest explanations to why narrators act in specific ways, and so on. As I have interpreted it, the goal of the task is to have students discuss any aspect of interest.

Solid Gold 2 by Eva Hedencrona, Karin Smed-Gerdin and Peter Watcyn-Jones, consists of 36 texts divided into nine chapters: Go-ahead, Challenges, In Transition, Classics, Shop Till You Drop, The Arts, Glimpses of England, Yes or No! and Outlook on the US. Listening activities are included in all chapters. The texts are often, but not always, introduced by a paragraph that describes the text's author. The pedagogic tasks do not directly follow the texts but are provided in a separate exercise section. Different texts are assigned different types of tasks: Starter, Textwork, Interact, and Activity are common, but others include grammar and vocabulary activities, which I have excluded in this analysis. The Interact and Activity-tasks are for students to discuss and consider, which, similarly to *Blueprint: Version 2.0 B* asks for students to include their own opinions and experiences.

Viewpoints 2 by Linda Gustafsson and Uno Wivast consists of 21 texts divided into six chapters: Viewpoints, Angles of Love, Nasty Business, Breaking Free, and Classics. Each chapter includes texts with accompanying activities to improve students' reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. Before each text, a Before reading-prompt is provided, often including several aspects for students to consider, research, or discuss with a friend. Thereafter, a paragraph follows which explains the context of the text being introduced. Further texts of interest in *Viewpoints 2* are the Speaking sections that follow the texts, as they too ask students questions they are expected to contemplate with a friend.

Although the textbooks are different in structure, the texts in the identified pedagogic tasks share similarities of requesting students to consider their own experiences and are therefore

the main subjects of my analysis, together with the images or illustrations belonging to the main literary texts.

Analysis

The analysis is divided into four different parts. First, an overview of cultural representation and the topics dealt with is presented. Then the focus of the analysis turns to the aspect of the implied reader, followed by a section discussing examples of Othering that could be found in the textbooks. Lastly, an analysis of the textbooks visual elements is carried out, discussing mainly two chosen photos in more depth.

Overview of representation and topics in the textbooks

The authors of the material claim that the chosen literary works and the way of working with the texts are meant to align with the core content of English 6. However, the material partially lack alignment with the content of communication expected in the course: "Samhällsfrågor, sociala, kulturella, politiska och historiska förhållanden samt värderingar i olika sammanhang och områden där engelska används" 'Social issues and social, cultural, political and historical conditions as well as values in different contexts and areas where English is used' (Skolverket 5). An overview of the main literary texts that are represented shows that the authors of the texts in the textbooks are mainly from England, Ireland, and the US. This aligns with the geographic focus of the English subject generally but results in many other countries where English is used being excluded altogether. *Blueprint 2.0 B*, for example, includes texts solely from these three countries. The literary works in *Viewpoints 2* and *Solid Gold 2* are somewhat more spread geographically, including texts from English speaking countries such as Australia and New Zealand. When it comes to topics, most deal with love and friendship, culture, workplaces, human rights, and environmental issues. When the topics are about things they are supposed to relate to, such as the ones mentioned, they are placed in a culture they are supposed to be familiar with, and thus they are not asked to focus on these aspects as part of a specific culture – the Western culture is made invisible and implicitly assumed for students to be familiar with. Meanwhile, the topics that deal with human rights and culture often portray other countries than UK/US, which the content in most other cases centers around. This could be seen as pointing somewhere else when the topics deal with complex societal issues rather than pointing to similar issues in the Western countries. On the other

hand, there are some exceptions where minority groups' voices are heard, such as African American authors portraying topics of racial inequality in the US, but they are few.

In one of the textbooks, *Blueprint 2.0 B,* a separate chapter deals exclusively with a theme of non-Western cultures, while in *Viewpoints 2* and *Solid Gold 2,* they are more spread out based on other topics within the text. In the case of *Blueprint 2.0 B*, that section is, with only one exception, the one time where non-Western people are represented at all, including both texts and images.

Othering

The representation of cultures in the textbook *Blueprint 2.0 B* is conflicting; the literary texts provided are limited to the origin of only England, Ireland, and the US. Despite that, there is a chapter named "Culture Clashes" which consists of texts that explicitly discuss postcolonial theory—such as exploitation and Edward Said's *Orientalism*— and self-appointed Western superiority. The texts included in the chapter are "The Poor Savage", which is a listening exercise based on an excerpt from *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, "When Cultures Clash" by Chris Anderson, "The Australians Who Are Outcasts in Their Own Land" by Barbara McMahon, and "Curled or Straight?" from *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. Although the texts discuss and problematize colonialism and racism, it is partly done from a Western perspective. The surrounding texts and tasks are mainly centered around reading comprehension in this section, besides one task provided under the category Reflect & Share belonging to the text about the oppression of Australian Aborigines: ""Talk" in English, but "chatter" in Murrinh-patha – is there possibly a condescending view on languages here? If so, how?" (133). Here, an awareness of language hierarchy shows. Nevertheless, the chapter "Culture Clashes" is the only one representing non-Western cultures in the entire textbook, and all texts portray those cultures as exploited, abused, or under hegemonic control.

This pattern of portraying non-Western cultures as victims is repeated in another textbook: in *Viewpoints 2*, there are six texts written by non-Western authors – and five of these describe negative experiences of slavery, exile, lack of gender equality and failed arranged marriages. The narrator that is not Western can never simply exist, thrive, or contemplate on universal matters but must always experience suffering from their position in the world as a non-Western citizen. One of the texts that deals with one of these topics is "Nuptial problems", an excerpt from *Girls of Riyadh* by Rajaa Alsanea. Before reading, the students are asked to consider the following question: "How do you think the traditional marriage

process in Sweden (go out with someone, move in together, propose, get engaged, get married etc.) differs from that in other countries?" (51). Here, the parenthesis clarifies that there is no assumption that the students are familiar with the dating process in Sweden, possibly because they are too young to be expected to know of it. Neither is there any assumption of the implied reader to belong to Western culture. However, the plot of the story is relevant in this context: Sadeem, the narrator, is set up for an arranged marriage. After the legal wedding, she decides to have sex with her husband before the traditional Saudi Arabian wedding takes place, leading to things ending badly. Since the question asks students to compare (dating) cultures, directly followed by an example where a woman in Saudi Arabian culture suffers from her actions, the students are set up to believe, or confirm, that Swedish (dating) culture is somehow better than other (dating) cultures. This aligns with Said's thoughts on the Middle East being pictured as "different" (62), an Other, while Sweden is pictured as "normal", a We (62).

In contrast, the texts in *Solid Gold 2* that originates from China, India and Australia are concerned with, for example, themes of HBTQ and success in sports. There are exceptions, such as *Hemi's Gift* by TJ Corrigan being specifically about being Māori in New Zealand and Malala Yousafzai's text which portrays her experience of getting shot by the Taliban, but the pattern is not the same. There is one example where non-Western culture is represented in a positive manner – the text *We are the future* by Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum. It deals with the topic of virtues of immigration, such as school success in the US, and the message is emphasized by choosing not one but seven images of Asian students in school situations. From a critical perspective, the depiction could be seen as reinforcing stereotypical images of Asian students as educational over-achievers. Further, the surrounding texts and tasks do not address the topic in depth. The questions students are asked are: 1) "Why do you think so many people emigrate to the USA?" and 2) "In what ways does the USA benefit from immigration?" (312). The perspective is focused on how the US could benefit from immigration rather than the people the text deals with, excluding questions as to why they have emigrated, what they have experienced and what circumstances construct Asians to become successful students. The lack of those types of questions results in a type of Othering where the Asians have been anonymized and depicted as only that stereotype, which lacks nuance.

The implied (Western) reader

Examples of explicit assumptions of the implied reader's experiences and alignment with Western culture could be found in one of the three textbooks: *Viewpoints 2*. The first example is a Before reading-prompt that introduces the text "The Foreign Londoner", an extract from *Youth* by South African author J.M. Coetzee. The prompt is formulated as follows: "What is the meaning of the word 'exile'? Do you know anyone who is living in exile? What do you think it is like to live in exile?" (85). In this text, the authors ask the students to contemplate these matters as if there is no possibility that they may have experienced exile themselves. A similar example is found in another Before reading-prompt that introduces the text "Where Freedom Grows", an extract from *The View from Coyaba* by South African/Jamaican author Peter Abrahams. The text portrays runaway Jamaican slaves. Here, students are asked to "Imagine [being] on the run from somebody or something. What would you be prepared to do to keep ahead?" (151). The verb *imagine* indicates that being on the run from something is something the students are not expected to have experienced, although many students in Swedish schools have fled from war in their home countries. These types of explicit assumptions could not be found in either *Blueprint 2.0 B* or *Solid Gold 2*.

The chapter "Culture Clashes" in *Blueprint 2.0 B* has already been discussed in terms of Othering. However, it also functions to position an implied Western reader. The tasks' focus is directed at reading comprehension, which leads to other questions being excluded. The students are not asked to engage more critically with the topic colonialism. Further, colonialism is depicted as something nonrelatable and external, where the implied reader is removed from that context and seen as someone who is not living in a (post)colonial existence. It is presented as something to learn about that is not part of the implied reader's reality. Therefore, although no explicit assumptions of the implied reader could be found, there are still implicit assumptions about the expected student identity.

As mentioned in the methods and materials section, the arrangement of the textbooks differs as in one book, some tasks are presented prior to reading, in another book, they are presented directly after reading, and in the third, they are presented in a separate section at the end of the book. They all deal with reading comprehension, word work, and certain grammar exercises, and in almost all cases, there is some aspect that requires students to interact with the current text topic. However, in *Solid Gold 2*, that pattern is broken. The tasks under the heading Interact generally ask students to discuss their reflections and understandings of the topic, often in relation to their own experiences and opinions. However, when the topic deals with the experiences of African Americans in the US, the focus directly shifts. For example,

the text *Quiet Strength* by Susan Cain that centers around Rosa Parks refusing to give up her bus seat for a white person, is followed by the Interact heading asking for students to consider 1) "What does the heading 'Quiet Strength' refer to?" and 2) "Why don't we usually give credit to being shy and quiet?" (308). In comparison, the text *For a laugh* by Eugene Salomon, which deals with a story of a taxi driver whose ethnicity is never addressed, is accompanied by an Interact-heading that asks students to consider 1) "How would you have reacted if you were the taxi driver when she told you that she had no money?", 2) "What do you think about the taxi driver's decision to give her a ride?", 3) "Why do you think the woman confides in the taxi driver?" and 4) "This is a heart-warming story. Why is it so?" (207). There are not only more tasks for the *For a laugh*-text, but they are also more focused on the reader's own opinions regarding the content, while the tasks for the *Quiet strength*-text do not ask students to in any way elaborate on their own opinions or experiences, nor to identify with Rosa Parks. Therefore, with certain texts, the content becomes the focus, which is not the case with others. To not be asked to engage with certain topics, such as racism, could also be seen as conveying something about the reader that is being constructed.

The depiction of Asian students in US schools which functioned as a way of Othering also repeats this pattern, where the questions position the implied reader as someone who does not need to have any prior knowledge about immigration to discuss it, which could imply that the reader is neither expected to have experienced immigration or to have experienced it. Therefore, in the case of *Solid Gold 2,* the reader is nonspecific and has no ethnic markers at all. However, that means that the reader is not seen as a person who can bring their own experiences into the classroom, and issues of hegemony are neglected altogether. Postcolonial topics are presented, but not engaged with, as a result of the empty identity position. Further, an empty identity position as such is only available for those who are not disadvantaged in a hegemonic society.

To conclude, the implied reader is constructed differently in the textbooks. In *Viewpoints 2*, the Western reader is constructed by explicit assumptions, while in *Blueprint 2.0 B,* the reader is constructed as someone who is standing outside of a postcolonial discourse—therefore implying a Western identity—and in *Solid Gold 2*, the implied reader has no ethnic markers at all.

Multimodal overview of visual elements and what they represent

The visual images function both as texts, similar to the literary works presented in the textbooks, since they convey content, but also function to position the readers – they become

viewers from a particular perspective. The strategies to look for in critical analysis are distance and angle, since that positions the viewer, but also whether people are portrayed as individuals or belonging to a specific group. Another aspect is the exclusion of those specific groups.

When examining the visual elements in the textbooks, which are often photographs, from an approach intending to describe the representation of cultures, the study requires generalizations and assumptions of the depicted people's heritage. In this section, people are spoken about as appearing white/non-white based on my reading of these images and my understanding of how they are read in a Swedish context.

As mentioned, the textbooks include primarily photos but also graphic illustrations. At least one visual element supports every text in all textbooks, and most have two or three. Their purpose is generally to emphasize specific text content; when a text deals with love, it is portrayed visually by, for instance, a photo of roses, a photo of a couple on the beach looking affectionately at each other, and so on. However, the textbooks differ in some aspects regarding the choice of visual elements supporting the texts.

In most cases, the elements in *Blueprint 2.0 B* consist of photos portraying people in some sort of action. The people are typically not facing the camera, or they are photographed from a long distance. When people face the camera, the photo is from movie adaptions of the text provided, such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Apart from the previously discussed chapter "Culture clashes", there are only two photos of non-white persons, and both photos pertain to the text "No Place to Call Home", an excerpt from *Grand Central Winter* by Lee Stringer (53). The text deals with homelessness and the narrator's struggle with overcoming drug addiction. The first photo shows a homeless man, seemingly sleeping, in a large red blanket (55), and the second shows a man holding a bundle of newspapers in his hands (57). These are two out of nine images depicting non-white people in a textbook containing a total of 43 images portraying people. The other seven are all gathered in the chapter "Culture Clashes", where the photos depict a market (140), a hairdresser in a hair salon (138), a woman with curly hair (144), a woman and child in an Aboriginal camp (131), and a man on a beach (123). The final two images depict Western exploitation of Asian children, which will be further discussed (128). There is no pattern in the choices of these images.

In *Solid Gold 2*, most visual elements are photos and illustrations of people. The book contains 42 visual elements portraying people; 18 of these are drawings or illustrations, and 24 are photographs. It is difficult to estimate how many non-white people are represented as

the drawings and illustrations are somewhat abstract, but the majority depicts white people. Further, there are more images of objects, such as airplanes, buildings, and vehicles, than of people overall.

The visual elements in *Viewpoints* 2 primarily contain photos of people. In contrast to the other two textbooks, the photos are often placed on entire pages where a photo is placed on the left page of the book and the text it accompanies is placed on the right page. Smaller photos are usually put in a corner of the page in the following pages of the text. The images contain people demonstrating, riding buses, being on vacation and so on, and often the faces of people are not in frame, which puts the focus on clothes or body parts as hands in motion. Compared to the other textbooks, groups are more often portrayed than individuals. White people are more frequently represented than non-white, but the distribution is more even than in *Blueprint 2.0 B*.

PCDA of visual elements

Image pertaining to the text "Assimilation or integration" (32)

Drawing on a PCDA approach, the analysis of visual elements showed examples where the Otherness of people of non-Western heritage is emphasized. One example is found in *Viewpoints 2*. The poem *Assimilation or integration?* by Oodgeroo Noonuccal is presented on the book's right page, while a photo covers the entire left page (32-33)[2]. The photo shows a classroom where five pupils sit by their benches, looking directly into the camera. Two of them are closer to the photographer – the left pupil is dark-skinned and has dark hair, and the right pupil is light-skinned and has blonde hair. In the text context, the reader understands that the girl on the left is an Aboriginal Australian, and the right girl is a white Australian. Their interaction with the viewer differs: the mouth of the girl to the left curves downwards, no expression on her face; meanwhile, the girl to the right smiles. She is engaged with the viewers of the photograph, seeming comfortable in her position. Therefore, the two girls body languages differ – the white girl leans toward the readers, while the Aboriginal girl keeps her distance. The photo is placed next to a large heading containing the title of a poem, *Assimilation or Integration?*. It is worth noting that this is the only image depicting people of

[2] Permission to use the photo in this degree project has been given by copyright holder IMAGO/IBL.

different ethnic backgrounds together in the entire textbook, yet its message is focused on the two girls' differences.

There are further examples where the emphasis is put on ethnicities' differences in visual images. In *Blueprint 2.0 B* there are three photos accompanying the text *When Cultures Clash* by Chris Anderson (127-129). As mentioned previously in the analysis, the topic is colonialism and exploitation. The text is split onto three pages; however, two images are placed over the entire second page, and the third image is placed below the final paragraphs of the text on the third page. Thus, text and images are equally proportioned, which means that the images are supposed to play a major part in the meaning-making of the main text. The first photo depicts a white man lying relaxed in a wooden recliner with paper and pencil in hand (128)[3]. His legs are crossed and feet bare, seeming content and relaxed. He might be speaking to someone outside of the picture. There is a table behind him with a wine bottle and wine glass. On the floor, in the right bottom corner of the photo, a dark-skinned child sits with what may be a large feather in her hand. She does not look at him but straight ahead, past him. Her purpose in the situation is to serve him. The second photo depicts a white woman on a beach, bending down to photograph a child who may be cooking, although that is unclear. The third visual element is a drawing which portray an execution of Aborigines in Australia. The images that have been chosen to represent exploitation, colonialism and its consequences are valid in the sense that they emphasize the meaning of the main text and provide clear examples where Western tourists exploit children. However, it is worth noting that none of the images are from modern day. The oldest photography, depicting the man and child, is dated Vietnam 1903 and shows a situation that would not be accepted today. This results in a sense of distance to what is being described, as if the implied reader has no part in a colonial existence where similar things happen. Both photos portray white people on vacation taking advantage of children's exposed positions—which is important—but the average Swedish upper secondary school student will not be able to see their own role in a world that exploits unprivileged people by, for instance, having them work underpaid and in horrible conditions to fill the needs of Western over-

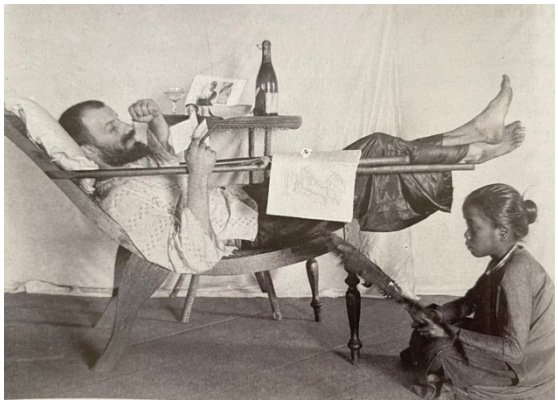

Image pertaining to the text "When Cultures Clash" (128)

[3] Permission to use the photo in this degree project has been given by copyright holder Viollet/IBL.

consumption. The lack of interaction between the depicted people and the viewers of the images, such as the photo of the tourist and servant girl, reinforces this.

Conclusion

The research questions of this project were: Who is the implied reader, based on assumptions of the expected experiences and culture, and what and who is constructed as deviant or Other?

The analysis showed that in one of the three analyzed textbooks, *Viewpoints 2*, an implied Western reader could be identified in explicit assumptions in the surrounding tasks. Meanwhile, the implied reader in *Blueprint 2.0 B* was positioned as a Western someone observing colonialism, appearing to never have experienced its negative consequences themselves, therefore implying a reader of Western heritage. In *Solid Gold 2*, the analysis showed that the implied reader had no ethnicity at all, with no own experiences to bring when discussing the material. The positioning of an implied reader in the textbooks is problematic in different ways. The explicit, implied reader in *Viewpoints 2* is easier for teachers and students to spot and therefore to question, and the reading prompts are, besides those assumptions, formulated as to leave room for students to add their experiences into important discussions. The implicit assumption of a Western reader in *Blueprint 2.0 B* may be less problematic than the implied reader in *Solid Gold 2* who has no ethnic markers at all, since the latter leads to ignoring students' possibilities to discuss and engage in societal problems that are related to the postcolonial world we all live in.

Further, when investigating what and who is constructed as deviant or Other, several cases where this occurred were found, mainly by *Viewpoints 2* and *Blueprint 2.0 B* representing people in non-Western cultures as consistently in a position of being oppressed. *Solid Gold 2* neither assumed an implied Western reader nor engaged in Othering, however it lacked important questions about the topics discussed in the main texts, especially when the texts dealt with minority groups' experiences. The multimodal analysis showed that white people are more frequently represented than other ethnical groups in all three textbooks, and when groups belonging to non-Western cultures are represented, the texts in most cases deal with negative topics. The one photo depicting two people with different ethnic backgrounds in *Viewpoints 2*, of the two girls in Australia, emphasized their differences – or rather the Aboriginal girl's Otherness. Lastly, an analysis of the photos portraying exploitation of Asian children in *Blueprint 2.0 B* showed that images from modern day was excluded, which led to

students being distanced to their own position in a world where children are exploited due to the West's consuming habits, which they inevitably are part of.

However, the analysis found examples where the authors have been aware of the importance of positive representation, such as emphasizing how immigrants contribute to school success. Despite that, that portrayal could also be seen as a reinforcement of certain stereotypes about Asian students. The stereotype in itself may not be necessarily harmful, but adds to the experiences of Othering to students, similar to naive micro aggressions.

All in all, a strength of this project is the continuous balance between the PCDA frameworks' expectations of the researcher to engage in critique of discourse and attempting to fulfill expectations of neutrality in conventional research practice. When it comes to limitations of this project, my own privileged position may have affected the analysis in terms of it affecting my ability to notice assumptions of an implied Western reader and cases of Othering. Additionally, there are more ESL textbooks left unexamined by postcolonial glasses, and by analyzing more material I might have found further types of Othering or examples of assumptions of the reader. Therefore, continued research in the field could benefit from examining more of the ESL textbooks available to Swedish schools. It would also be interesting to put more focus on the multimodal aspect and analyze further images in ESL textbooks in depth to see what they convey.

With regard to this study's findings, it is important to emphasize that ESL teachers, and anyone who works in education, must be aware of harmful assumptions, hegemonic ideas and lack of representation in textbooks being used in the classroom. Representation does matter, and it is teachers' responsibility to openly oppose reproduction of stereotypical portrayals of cultures. In a larger scale, continuous classroom discussions about societal inequality will affect how our students—and ultimately, the society we are part of—engage in improving the world we live in; even if that may be something as simple as recognizing who is left out in the reading prompts of a textbook.

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