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Abstract

The phenomenon of Unequal Englishes pervades Chinese contexts; however, more can be done to find out how it is embedded in Chinese college English textbooks. A study of Chinese college English listening and speaking textbooks shows that there are only few surface manifestations of Unequal Englishes in these textbooks which might be explained by the Chinese government's deliberate ideological control of English learning, thus confirming profound political influences on the production of English textbooks in China to a certain degree. This study, however, conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis which surfaces manifestations of Unequal Englishes in a specific lesson of a Chinese college English listening and speaking textbook published by a prestigious press in China.

Keywords: Unequal Englishes, Chinese college English textbooks, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

According to *The Globalist* (2017), English is used in as many as 110 countries in the world, using it as their native language, official language or second language. Thus, it is unsurprising how this has intensified the phenomenon of “English mania” across the world. At the national level, many countries recognize the significance of English and invest human, material and financial resources in promoting its learning domestically (Tong, 2015). The root of this phenomenon lies in the acceleration of economic globalization powered by neoliberalism, which is not only the political and economic paradigm, but also a dominant ideology, primarily grounded in notions and practices of free market, entrepreneurship, commodification, and financialization (Harvey, 2005). Central to this phenomenon is also the influential role and impact of superpower-America around the globe as billions of people learn English for the purpose of international communication to boost their countries’ economic development.

At the individual level, because of the ever-increasing recognition that English plays a vital role in the global economy, in many societies learning English is considered essential for one’s education or access to better-paying jobs (Haidar, Malik, & Khattak, 2022; Park & Wee, 2012). Meanwhile, English has been recognized as a “neutral, natural and beneficial language” which is not specifically connected with anyone’s culture, without obvious political actions and which brings economic benefits to individuals through acquisition (Pennycook, 1994; Rubdy, 2015). This de facto recognition serves as an important source of social and economic inequality, as individuals belonging to different social strata have differentiated access to English on account of varying resources at their disposal (Park & Wee, 2012; Henry, 2015). Nonetheless, social inequalities which implicate English are often justified based on the pretense proposed by neoliberal commodification which treats English as an acquirable skill with which

individuals should be equipped in order to make themselves more attractive and marketable commodities (Park & Wee, 2012; Chun, 2009).

In these global and local contexts, different approaches for understanding global English and the spread of English such as World Englishes (Kachru et al., 2006), English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2007), Global Englishes (Galloway & Rose, 2015), and English as an International Language (McKay, 2002) have come to the fore. According to Park and Wee (2012), intensifying critique of the global English coincided with a period of change during which the spread of English continued rapidly. Nevertheless, the advancement of information-communication technology and the rise of Internet have resulted in a considerable increase in the movement of people, goods, and ideas across national borders; in other words, it has led to a period of intensified globalization and economic neoliberalisation. In a sense, the phenomenon of Unequal Englishes (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015) has been implicated in this globally intensifying context, thus likewise necessitating the mobilization of the lens of Unequal Englishes (henceforth UE) itself to more accurately account for the increasingly complicated process of the spread and use of English. Besides, the inequalities UE aims to explain and address are shaped by specific social and ideological phenomena of local contexts (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015).

Galvanized by the forces of globalization as well, the Chinese government has placed emphasis on enhancing its citizens' English linguistic competence, thus contributing to what may be referred to as the "English Mania" in the country. Although Chinese government has reduced the number of English classes in schools, the scores of English exams still account for a large proportion in many high-stake exams in China, such as college entrance examinations. In this sense, although it may be argued that English mania may have been curbed to a certain extent, it still remains an ideological and political force in China. In addition, due to the influence of

the examination system since feudal China, Chinese education has always been exam-oriented. The largest group of English learners in China are students, and they are required to perform well in a variety of English exams which may decide their fates. This situation has also further promoted “English mania” in China (Tong, 2015). All this together has produced a specific configuration of UE in China, such as a situation of self-deprecation of Chinese-influenced English accents (Henry, 2015), thus subtly making Chinese speakers of English inferior to so-called native speakers of English.

Ideology is the system of social representations, views and values shared by people in a community (Van Dijk, 1998). It may reside in language to affect the views of dominated groups and produce consent to maintain power and establish hegemony by dominant groups (Phillipson, 1997; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). On the other hand, ideology could also resist hegemony by challenging the status quo (Savski, 2021). In this sense, we contend that texts and visuals in English Language Teaching (henceforth ELT) textbooks are social and cultural artifacts filled with particular beliefs, culturally “appropriate” values and norms, and ideologies, which impose particular effects on learners (Curdt-Christiansen, 2008; Gebregeorgis, 2016). The ideologies embedded in these texts and visuals are generally shaped by sociopolitical, economic and cultural factors. In our study, we aim to find out what ideologies and practices of UE are embedded in Chinese college English textbooks and how they are presented.

Literature Review

In the past four decades, pluralist approaches to English such as World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca, Global Englishes and English as an International Language have greatly challenged traditional views of English as a fixed, bounded and unified system (Jenkins, 2000; Kachru et al., 2006). Because of the nature of communication in a globalized world, English has become increasingly more diverse, fluid and ever changing (Mckay &

Bokhorst, 2008). Nevertheless, although these pluralist approaches have called into question some fundamentally flawed assumptions about English (Kachru, 1996), they have also been criticized for failing to account accurately for the vast panorama of English use in the globalized world within which many intersecting mechanisms of inequality operate.

UE refers to “the unequal ways and situations in which Englishes are arranged, configured, and contested” (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015, p. 3); and it also “seeks to find ways to address them...in a sustained and systematic way in geopolitical, sociocultural, and theoretical contexts” (p. 3). Englishes are linguistically equal but socio-politically unequal (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015), thus UE endeavors to address inequalities of Englishes not only between different countries but also between races, genders, classes, sexualities and other social categories within national borders. It aims to transform unequal power relations between English users and the ways they use the language, such as inequalities engendered by different valued “Standard English” and its varieties, as well as unequal relationships between English users themselves (e.g., native speakers vs. non-native speakers). Therefore, UE could be “a more useful and reasoned understanding of the global presence and spread of English” than WE (Tupas & Salonga, 2016, p. 368).

Park (2015) proposes that the dominant ideology of a “native speaker” means that one can never attain the desired level of English proficiency; therefore, English learning is an unending task which lasts a lifetime but the desired “native speaker” proficiency remains unattainable. Rubdy (2015) asserts that the supremacy of standard English and the dominant discourse of native speaker authority, which places non-native speakers in a position of deficit competence, are at the root of UE, and have much to do with the historical, economic, political and ideological processes associated with colonization and globalization. In this sense, probing deeply

into these processes is crucial in UE studies. Thus, neoliberalism and globalization constitute the “big context” in UE studies.

At the micro level, the challenge is how to disentangle “non-native speakers” from self-deprecating images and mental structures such as their prevalent belief in the inferiority of their own English proficiency. Parallel with the belief in the superiority of NS English, self-deprecation means NNSs themselves devaluing their own English proficiency and subscribing to so-called American Standard English (Tupas & Salonga, 2016). Many NNSs who have strong attachment to and affection for their own Englishes, thus they are on the arduous task of fighting to elevate the status of their varieties in their societies (Kubota, 2015; Park, 2015). Users of some dialects of Englishes begin to stand up and take various ways to gain prestige for their languages in the local context (Higgins, 2015). Nevertheless, self-deprecation remains an NNS practice which many have internalised in their everyday use of English (Park, 2015; Tupas & Salonga, 2016). Overall, native-speakerism and self-deprecation, among other things, go together to create and sustain inequalities of Englishes.

In the context of China, several studies on inequalities of English uses have already been reported. For instance, Henry (2015) analyzes the Chinglish jokes made and spoken by a Chinese teacher which are used to emphasize the negative effects of non-standard English, Chinglish in this case, in a training school. The stigmatization of Chinglish may cause students to approach their own language acquisition with suspicion, thus engendering and maintaining linguistic inequality through daily communication. The naturalization of Chinglish as a form of pathology rather than diversity strengthens the ideology of Standard English as a precious and positive social value and Chinglish-speaking as illegitimate participation in the English-speaking community. Pan (2015), on the other hand, elucidates on the linguistic landscape of Dashilan in Beijing, a historically prosperous commercial center, and finds out that globalization is an uneven process


which disadvantages people with low English proficiency in society. These studies clearly reveal that unequal relations caused by English uses are to some extent acquiesced to and accepted unconsciously in China. However, while there have indeed been scholarly investigations into inequalities of Englishes in China, we have yet to find a sustained study on Chinese college English textbooks which explicitly takes on the framework of UE. For Tupas and Weninger (2020), “Unequal Englishes place questions of linguistic inequality and unequal distribution of power at the heart of English language learning and teaching” (p.11). Therefore, by uncovering ideologies and practices associated with UE in a Chinese college English textbook, this study may help Chinese college ELT teachers develop critical thinking abilities in identifying unequal uses of Englishes. Because teachers convey to their students what they believe are ideologies found in textbooks (Tupas & Weninger, 2020), and that these ideologies are thought to be suitable to be exposed to the students by the teachers, they help shape ideological formation among their students.

Materials and Methodology

This study is part of a larger CDA study which has explored the dominant ideologies embedded in two Chinese college English listening and speaking textbooks (He, 2021). The results indicate that there are few explicit manifestations related to UE, and they are all from one lesson in a textbook. This could be due to the fact that the government exercises power over the ideological content of these textbooks (Li, 2012; Liu & Hu, 2011). In this study, we analyse a lesson found in one textbook imbued with textual and visual data implicating UE. This textbook is *New Horizon College English: Listening, Speaking and Viewing 2* (3rd edition) (henceforth *NHCE 2*) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2017. This textbook is part of a widely circulated series endorsed by the Chinese

government and produced by a prestigious publisher. Therefore, the series is the most widely circulated textbooks in China. The basic information of the textbook is presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Introduction to NHCE 2*

Name of the textbook	<i>New Horizon College English: Listening, Speaking and Viewing 2</i>
Picture of the cover of the textbook	
Topics of units in the textbook	Life is a learning curve Journey into the unknown Time out Life under the spotlight Urban pulse Climbing the career ladder Time of technology: A blessing or a curse Discovering your true identity
Components of the textbooks	It includes 8 units. Each unit is composed of four parts: listening to the world; speaking for communication; further practice in listening; and wrapping up for self-assessment.

In this paper, we examine a case study in which one lesson was teased out and analyzed from the textbook identified above. The research question is “What are the ideologies and practices associated with Unequal Englishes in a Chinese college English textbook?”

In order to check whether manifestations of UE are embedded in the written texts and visuals in the textbooks, the codebook of UE ideologies and practices was established before the analysis, and they are: Native Speakerism (Rubdy, 2015; Ha, 2015) and self-deprecation (Park, 2015). It must be noted that in the larger research we have used a more robust codebook which also includes resistance in uses within a variety (Higgins, 2015), resistance of uses across varieties (Kubota, 2015), threat of English use on other languages (Rubdy, 2015) and whiteness/white supremacist (Kubota, 2015, 2019). For the purpose of this paper, we use Native Speakerism and self-deprecation as we zero in on one lesson. The purpose is straightforward – to identify textual spaces or locations of the presence of UE.

In this paper, we use the notion of ‘discourse’ as espoused in the work associated with Critical Discourse Analysis. It is a useful take on the notion of language as discourse because our paper also starts with the assumption that discourse is shaped by relations of power and invested with ideologies. Our critical orientation thus is also towards exposing ideological systems in language use and how they are interrelated with larger social structures which are historical and socio-political in nature (Fairclough, 2013). The written and spoken texts in listening and speaking textbooks are infused with certain ideologies, and these texts/discourses are shaped by multiple factors such as the dynamics of the Chinese context and global backdrop, as well as that of neoliberal globalization. In this light, similar to how CDA locates texts/discourses in textbooks within the complex dynamics of context, consistently showing how ideologies and values are produced in written and visual images (Widodo, 2018; Xiong & Yuan, 2018), and then addressing them (Fairclough, 1995, 2013), this paper also situates ideologies associated with UE within broader historical and social contexts of use.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of an analysis of the lesson imbued with manifestations of UE. To ensure and guarantee the consistency of the analysis, two experienced Chinese college English teachers were asked to help in constructing what constitutes the codebook, and checking and affirming the coded/identified manifestations of UE in *NHCE 2*.

The lesson from Unit 1 Life is a learning curve on p. 6 in *NHCE 2* is a radio program called Ask the Expert offering suggestions on English learning from 'native speakers' (NSs) to 'non-native speakers' (NNSs). The 'expert' is a female NS teacher whose name is Sally Parker; meanwhile, there is a presenter playing the role of the host to read the questions raised by NNSs and give corresponding comments on the expert's advice. The genre of radio program in the textbook is a typical representation of genre hybridity (Bhatia, 1997) because it is not the traditional genres found in ELT textbooks (Lahdesmaki, 2009). It can establish affinity with students as it imitates real-life situations. Moreover, the topics discussed in the program are the ones relevant to students' daily life. In this sense, the students imagine themselves as the NNS who receive suggestions from so-called native speakers. In this way, this genre can facilitate the inculcation in students of the ideologies embedded in the text.

The discourse pattern of this program is a typical Problem-Solution pattern which comprises of a situation, a problem, a response and a positive evaluation or ending (Hoey, 2001). Two NNSs are asking for suggestions from an NS teacher on English learning on a radio program. One NNS, Andy, has two problems -- too frightened to speak English and poor grammar. The solutions from the 'expert' Sally are to speak to himself and not worry about

making mistakes. The problem of the other NNS, Olivia, is that she cannot understand NSs' pronunciation. The 'expert' suggestions are to listen to English as much as possible and focus on listening and reading at the same time. All of the solutions from the NS expert have received positive evaluation from the presenter or the programme host. The following is the text of this listening material in which P stands for presenter and S refers to Sally.

P: Hi. You're listening to *Ask the Expert* and in today's program we're talking about languages and how to learn a language. Our expert today is Sally Parker, who is a teacher. Hi Sally.

S: Hello.

P: Sally, our first question today is from Andy. He says, "I've just started learning English. My problem is that I'm too frightened to speak. My grammar is not very good, so I'm worried about saying the wrong thing." Have you got any advice for Andy?

S: Ok. Well, the first thing is I think Andy should practice speaking to himself.

P: Speaking to himself? I'm not sure that's a good idea.

S: I know it sounds silly, but talking to yourself in a foreign language is a really good way to practice. You don't have to feel embarrassed, because nobody can hear you. You can talk to yourself about anything you like—what you had for breakfast, where you're going for the weekend—anything. And the more you do it, the more you will get used to hearing your own voice and your pronunciation, so you won't feel so frightened in the classroom. Andy should try it.

P: Hm, I suppose so. Anything else? What about his grammar?

S: He has only just started learning English, so he is going to make lots of mistakes, but that's not a problem. That's how he'll learn. Andy shouldn't worry about making mistakes.

P: You're right. So Andy, try talking to yourself, and don't worry about making mistakes. Our next problem comes from Olivia in Brazil. She is worried about pronunciation. She says, "The problem is I can't understand native speakers. They speak so fast and I can't understand their pronunciation." So Sally, any ideas for Olivia?

S: Well, first of all it's a good idea for her to practice her listening skills. She should listen to English as much as possible to get used to how it sounds. Listen to the news, listen to podcasts, (and) watch English television.

P: OK—that's a good idea.

S: And another thing she should do is to focus on listening and reading at the same time. If you listen to something on the Internet, you can often read the transcript. If you listen and read at the same time, it'll help you see what the words sound like and how the words sound when a native speaker is talking.

P: Great. Thank you, Sally. Well, huh, I'm afraid that's all we have time for today, but next week we'll be...

The dialogue in this radio program exposes several ideologies of UE. To begin with, so-called native speakers are treated as the expert authority and norm makers in English language use in this radio program. Both Andy and Olivia who seek advice on how to speak English well are most likely from the Expanding Circle or those who use English in contexts where it still has limited coverage and functions (Kachru, 1996; Kachru et al., 2006). Evidence includes the fact that Andy is presented as a beginning adult learner of

English, and that Olivia is from Brazil. The stereotype that NSs are bearers of the ‘ideals’ of English language use and English language teaching methodology, and that constructive and useful English learning advice for NNSs should come from them, is a typical manifestation of native speakerism (Rubdy, 2015; Ha, 2015). Furthermore, the repeated use of the second-person pronoun “you” to refer to NNSs but the first-person pronoun “we” to refer to two NSs indicate that they belong to different groups and cannot integrate, thus drawing a clear boundary between NSs and NNSs and positioning Chinese college students as NNSs as well. As the number of NNSs from the Expanding circle far outnumbers the NSs from Inner Circle countries (Galloway & Rose, 2015), the NNSs generally have more chances to communicate with NNSs than with NSs in the real world today. Therefore, emphasizing the unilateral need to understand the pronunciation of NSs exclusively in the radio program does not reflect the real situation of English uses today.

In addition, when the presenter in the program introduces Olivia’s problem, he says, “she is worried about pronunciation”. This evidences the embeddedness of self-deprecation as this sentence implies that if an NNS cannot understand NS’ pronunciation, he/she should be anxious about it. In another sense, when an NNS’ pronunciation is different from the NS’, the responsibility for communication to be successful rests solely on the former, instead of making it a mutual effort from both parties to make effective communication happen. As a result, this dialogue legitimizes NS pronunciation as the standard which speakers of ESL/EFL should aspire to, otherwise they will (or should) get worried.

It will also be noted that the advice from the 'expert' is given using modal auxiliary forms such as 'can' or 'will' to express her affirmation of the validity or reasonableness of the suggestions. It is a subtle way to position the native speaker as superior, thus the legitimate expert in all talk about English. All of the suggestions from the native speaker elite in this program are all emphasized and undergirded by the presenter's remarks like "You're right.", "Great!" and "That's a good idea.", thus further perpetuating native speakerism and self-deprecation.

In terms of manifestations related to UE in Figure 1, we need to first provide a description of the picture which is attached to the listening task where a Caucasian male is speaking to a brown-colored female while they are reading a book; the woman, on the other hand, is listening attentively. The close shot, eye-level and frontal angle, could establish affinity with the viewers to let them integrate into the scene more quickly and easily (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Taking the content of this radio program into consideration, this picture implies that an NS takes on the responsibility to teach English to an NNS. Therefore, this picture presents a similar situation to the one in the radio program. In addition, with the NNS' show of satisfaction of the teaching which can be implied from the big smile on her face, the picture naturalizes the NS as the maker of the standard for English uses, thus perpetuating again native speakerism/native-speaker standards. In the era characterized by high mobility of people and increasingly frequent communication among people from different racial and cultural backgrounds in the world, this is of course problematic. There is a need to move beyond this kind of dualistic views of English, including the dichotomy between NSs and NNSs. In addition, we should put more focus on language practices of speakers than on language forms for effective communication

(Canagarajah, 2013), while also recognizing that all forms of English should be treated with equal respect (Soler & Morales-Galvez, 2022).

Figure 1

An image embedded with native-speaker standards in NHCE 2 on p.6



Conclusion

In the global context of neoliberalism, the hegemony of certain English ‘standard’ varieties has been reported in the Chinese context (Henry, 2015). Nonetheless, rare embedding of explicit manifestations of UE in Chinese college English textbooks may imply the meticulous planning of Chinese authorities to diminish the negative effects of these ideologies and practices on Chinese college students. This phenomenon can be explained by Chinese government’s endeavor to promote Chinese culture (O’Regan, 2021) and increase Chinese students’ national confidence advocated by Chinese leaders. Furthermore, Lam (2005) has identified six stages of English language planning and policy in China, and the focus of English language policies in China during each period aligns with the Chinese government’s political policy decisions. Although the primary reason for implementing

language policies in China today is global integration, the Chinese government has taken countermeasures to minimize the effects of English learning on Chinese language and culture, such as inhibition from using English acronyms in materials published in China (Zhang, 2012). In addition, the ideological control through textbooks has already been further tightened in China, especially after the student demonstration in Hongkong in 2019 which has aroused the attention of the central government. As a result, the proposal, "Ideological and Political Education in All Courses" firstly introduced by the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government in 2014, has been carried out vigorously and has gained momentum in a short period. Thus, the results of the analysis of the larger research from which the current study was drawn could evidence the tight control from Chinese government to a certain degree.

Nevertheless, as we have seen from the discussion above, ideological control can never be absolute (Higgins, 2015; Kubota, 2015), thus harmful ideologies can still slip into textbooks which thus requires critical attention on the part of scholars and educators. In the case of this paper, we have seen specific ideological manifestations associated with UE in *NHCE 2*, namely native speakerism and self-deprecation. Thus, while there are indeed few manifestations of this kind, it shows that UE does enter classroom materials surreptitiously. Consequently, Chinese college English teachers should remain vigilant to such instantiations of UE and know how to address them. Consequently, those who work with the teaching tasks of *NHCE 2* should be able to foster their students' critical thinking abilities on ideologies related to UE through the following: implicit or explicit analysis of ideologies, critical questioning of these ideologies, and writing assignments which reflect on ideologies. In addition, future studies might consider analyzing Chinese college English textbooks in other courses, such as Chinese college English reading and writing textbooks, to gain a broader picture of possible manifestations of UE in Chinese English textbooks at the tertiary level.