

# The Construction of Cultural Diversity in EFL Textbooks for Chinese Primary Students: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract**—This essay discusses the construction of cultural diversity in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks for Chinese primary students, particularly for senior students in primary school. For analyzing materials in this textbook, this essay adopts several examples in the textbook to prove that the learning materials reflect different cultural diversity and students' attitudes on this. Firstly, the essay will briefly introduce Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which will be used to analyze the textbook's cultural diversity. Furthermore, the methodological framework will be introduced by explaining the primary analyzing process, and then the discursive construction of cultural value reflected in the material is analyzed and explained in detail [1]. Also, this part includes the influence of cultural diversity in primary students' social and ideology identities, which provides a sufficient explanation for designing textbooks considering cultural diversity. Lastly, the conclusion will summarise the main finding and the implications of using ideological teaching materials for Chinese primary students in the EFL education context.

**Keywords**—English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, critical discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), textbooks, primary students, cultural diversity

## I. INTRODUCTION

A language is a tool for delivering cultural diversity and ideology from materials, which also behind English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks for Chinese primary students. With globalization, EFL education is becoming more critical than before, reflecting changes in the characteristic of textbook structure and discourse. The textbook plays a significant role in teaching and learning [2]. Especially in China, textbooks are often used to guide standardized classroom teaching, and they are also the most rigorous and authoritative learning materials for teachers to conduct teaching. However, with the change of times and the progress of society, teaching objectives have also changed. Nowadays, textbooks can convey knowledge to learners and help them establish the cultural diversity expressed by the Chinese EFL textbook.

Moreover, through careful analysis of the text, it can help learners understand cultural diversity and the generation of ideological processes in language learning. As some scholars have pointed out, knowledge is more than knowledge in schools, often accompanied by other values [3]. In selecting English textbook materials for primary schools in China, these learning materials are accompanied by the understanding and learning of social and cultural diversity and traditional concepts, helping students build many emotions and focus on their spiritual growth.

## II. THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to explore the complicated relationship between the linguistic context and the real world, which refers to analyzing the text socially according to social interaction [4]. In Ref. [1], the CDA aims to research the relationship of language using and society, political and power, which means that the CDA is appropriate for discussing the structure of specific ideology text. Therefore, the use of CDA is significant for analyzing the teaching materials in the textbook. In the light of the description of the CDA framework, I adopted the three analytic techniques, including vocabulary, grammar and textual structures. It is essential to explore the experiential values in vocabulary, such as rewording, synonymy, formal words because the choice of words is aiming to learn more words and reflects ideological information in complex cultural diversity. Besides, the choice of grammar can help convey the meaning and logic of language, for example, usage of positive sentences or passive sentences. The textual structure is responsible for identifying the meaning of the materials and context.

## III. THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Two volumes separated the EFL textbook, PEP English textbook, in China for primary students for each grade, designed by the educationalist who worked in the Ministry of Education in China, and cooperating with Canadian press, Lingo Media Group, since 2003 [5]. In this essay, the cultural diversity will be indicated from three passages for primary students from different grades, consisting of grade 4, grade 5 and grade 6, but these three texts emphasized typical value, which refers to encouraging cultural diversity in textbooks. Moreover, these three passages, including Sports and Games, Special Days and Around world, presented different learning level for students. Providing main perspectives on the discourse of cultural diversity refers to national sports, different traditional festivals, and different countries' characteristics.

## IV. DISCOURSE

### A. *Sports and Games—National Sports*

The first passage from fourth grade, Primary Exit Profile (PEP) English textbook, volume 1, and the topic is to introduce all kinds of sports and discuss favorite games from different countries, giving a good opportunity for students to experience the cultural diversity through reading this passage (see Fig. 1).

The personal pronouns, such as “They” and “You,” refer to identify and the impression this foreign community, encouraging Chinese students to try any of this to experience diversity of culture through these sports. Also, Fig. 1 shows vivid images, doing target sports or games, which help students get close to understanding these different cultures. The words “American”, “English”, “Korean”, “Russian” in Fig. 1 are direct and clear to point out their nations and characteristic in exercise, helping primary students to establish the awareness of cultural diversity and impression of different national sports. The use of adjectives in the Fig. 1 aims to pay attention to the features of these sports and games, for example, “strong” and “fast”, these words also refer to remarkable sports spirit, which is beneficial for students to comprehend and imitate, and demonstrating the cultural diversity in the sports field. Furthermore, these actions and sports in the Fig. 1 are relevant to students’ daily lives, arousing their learning interests in class and teaching them to respect other cultures. The modal verb “can” be used to encourage students to try more sports in other countries to promote cultural diversity. In addition, the overall structure is relatively simple and straightforward, which can be quickly understood and deeply impressed with Fig. 1. According to discussion, it is a clear, interesting passage, and it is easy to understand for fourth-grade students, who should be encouraged to do exercise every day. Also, Fig. 1 offers clear cultural information by expressing related pictures for students’ better understanding of the importance of cultural diversity. Furthermore, Fig. 1 also encourages every student to try different sports and do games with their foreign friends, establishing their friendly attitude toward international students and awareness of cultural diversity.

Overall, Fig. 1 provides the value of respecting cultural diversity and delivering a positive attitude for sports and games with classmates, encouraging students to experience different cultures through sports and be confident in games.

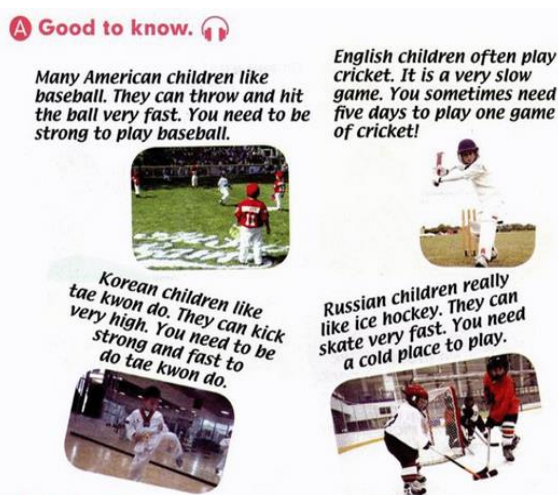


Fig. 1. PEP English textbook (4th grade), volume 1.

### B. Special Days—Different Traditional Festivals

Passage two was represented in fifth grade, volume 2 of the PEP English textbook, which provided two different traditional festivals in China and Western countries, consisting of the Dragon Boat Festival and Halloween. Both special festivals are significant in two countries’ cultural history, which refers to exploring different cultures and

traditions of China and Western countries (see Fig. 2).

The adjective “special” is the keyword in this unit and the passage, emphasizing the differences between the Dragon Boat Festival and Halloween, which help students understand that Halloween is as unique as the Dragon Boat Festival in China. The use of “Qu Yuan”, “zongzi” in the Fig. 2 is an excellent way to spread the proper noun in Chinese. Compared to the use of “costumes”, “candy”, and “like monsters”, it is easier for students to grab the main features of Halloween and establish the main concepts of this festival. There are several words in the Fig. 2 focus on explain the name of the special festival. For example, “Dragon Boats” refers to a kind of race in the south of China, which is part of their traditional culture and essential activity in this festival, while the main activity in Halloween is to “dress up like a monster” and go for “candy”. The descriptions of special festivals in the Fig. 2 are exciting and enrich the happy life of people all over the world. Grammatically speaking, both the active voice and the affirmative sentence are used in the Fig. 2. Most of them are declarative sentences describing two different important festivals to achieve a pronounced contrast effect. In the Fig. 2 has a strong sense of contrast in structure. With the help of pictures, it clearly expresses the characteristics of two different festivals. At the same time, cultural diversity is subtly emphasized so that students can understand other cultures and learn to participate in the traditional cultures of other countries. Observing Fig. 2, it is a powerful proof of cultural diversity; the foreign child holds a zongzi and feels happiness; on the other hand, the Chinese child dresses a cloak like a monster or a wizard, who is ready for getting candy. Both of them are participating in experiencing a different culture and help the development of cultural diversity.

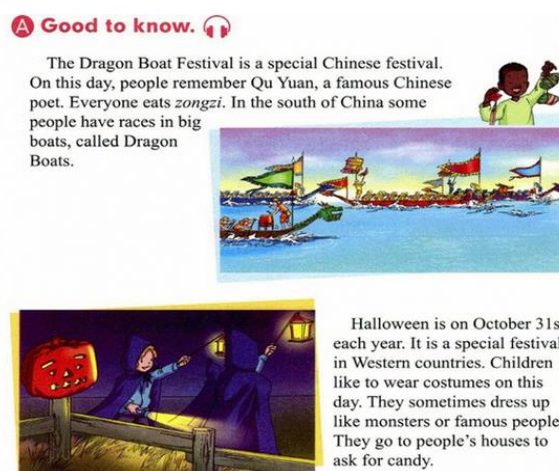


Fig. 2. PEP English textbook (5th grade), volume 2.

In conclusion, Fig. 2 is longer and more complex than the first one, which provides perspectives on developing cultural diversity and encouraging students to try different traditional festivals. Fig. 2 emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity and the importance of students’ participation in diverse cultures, which is conducive to the development of cultural diversity.

### C. Around World—Characteristics of Different Countries

This passage is from sixth grade, volume 2 of the PEP English textbook, a reading passage for students by

introducing four different countries' main characteristics. It is a matching activity, and students should match them according to descriptions. Although, this passage includes multiple information about the UK, Canada, USA and Australia, which provides a brief introduction of the world. Moreover, it is beneficial for students to understand the difference among these countries and experience the cultural diversity in matching activity (see Fig. 3).

It is clear that the adjective word "beautiful" was used four times in the Fig. 3 for describing four countries standard features, which shows the positive and friendly attitude and perspectives on different culture by mentioning key scenic spots and place of interests, and it is beneficial for developing cultural diversity for students in learning Fig. 3. The use of famous proper nouns are significant and necessary in the Fig. 3, for example, "British Museum", "Disneyland", "CN Tower", "Sydney Opera House", "Tower Bridge", "London Eye" and "White House", these words refer to typical and famous place in these foreign countries, and the images in the Fig. 3 can help students to image those place of interests. Hence, this passage aims to briefly introduce and characterize these countries and help students establish a basic world comprehension. Furthermore, the matching task provides possible activity in these countries, such as "hiking", "fishing", "swim", "eat seafood", "take photos", "ride", "visit", these verbs refer to recommendation of exciting activities in these beautiful place, which can arouse students' interests and curious about foreign countries, reflecting the cultural diversity during possible travel and this textbook. Moreover, it indicates several local unique animals. For instance, "Koalas" and "kangaroos" in Australia are their particular local animals that can attract students' attention and interests because most students like animals, which is also the impression of being friendly with nature and animals. Personal pronouns can connect individuals with real-world circumstances, for example, "you". Fig. 3 also uses the modal verb "can" to introduce special activities that can be done in different countries.

On the whole, participants are dominant, and the sentences are active and positive. Because Fig. 3 is a complete text and a matching activity, it will be more interactive in structure, and students will have a higher degree of participation in the Fig. 3. On the one hand, Fig. 3 embodies the cultural diversity in this unit, which suggests students acquire the national knowledge of different countries. On the other hand, it offers an opportunity to travel around the world in the COVID-19 situation, helping students learn the unique characteristics of four countries and learn from Fig. 3.

In summary, the last picture is the most complex and complicated among these three pictures, but it combined with the more detailed information and demonstrated the cultural diversity for students' understanding. Also, this picture can be considered as guidance for a world tour with friendly and reasonable suggestions, arousing students' interests quickly.

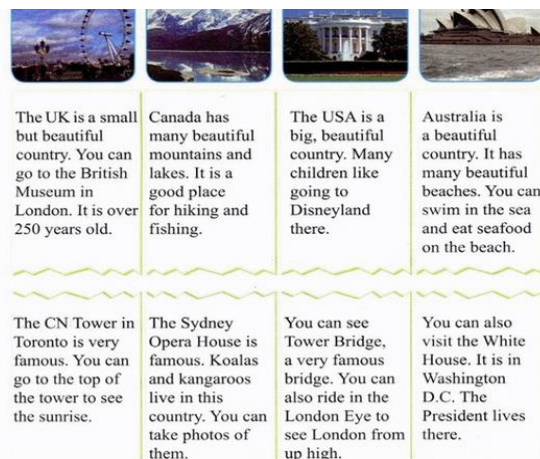


Fig. 3. PEP English textbook (6th grade), volume 2.

## V. DISCUSSION

The reflection of cultural diversity shows from three different aspects in the PEP English textbook for Chinese primary students, including national sports, different traditional festivals and the characteristics of different countries. Cultural diversity is a complicated concept that may consist of various perspectives and mainly refer to different traditions, values, faith, etc. [6]. Generally, the PEP English textbook keeps the balance between foreign culture and Chinese culture, which is appropriate for Chinese students to understand the traditional cultures while acquiring foreign cultural information, helping them establish the awareness of cultural diversity in the global world [7]. Besides, according to the data, this textbook includes 6% of cultural information, which is higher than the NV English textbook (2.6% for cultural information) [8]. The results of the data show that the significance of cultural diversity presented in this textbook. Furthermore, in the primary stage of learning English, the cultural information in textbooks can help students learn a second language from both humanistic and academic levels [9]. Leading them to actively understand different values and life attitudes is conducive to cultural diversity and students' critical thinking in future academic studies.

On the other hand, excessive cultural and educational mixing, for students in lower grades, their values and world outlook has not been fully established. The miscellany of cultural information in the classroom may lead to obstacles to personal identity recognition and national identity recognition [10]. The culture of any country will have both the essence and the dregs. While emphasizing cultural diversity in teaching, it is also necessary to help students establish correct values and a rational way of thinking. For example, Chinese textbooks often reflect Confucius' philosophy of education, including patriotism, humility, respect, etc., and contain the traditional and rigid concept of absolute obedience to the elders. Such similar and rigid educational concept and culture are exactly what teaching needs to abandon in the new century.

## VI. IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

These three texts can reflect cultural diversity in Chinese English textbooks through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), including understanding sports programs in other countries, the study of special festivals, and the introduction of scenic spots and historical sites in other countries. Through the analysis of vocabulary, grammar and text structure, the emphasis and expression of cultural diversity in the textbooks are strengthened.

According to the CDA, on the whole, the PEP English textbook is very suitable for the English teaching of primary school students in China, and it also highly reflects the development of cultural diversity and the social globalization process. However, there are still some aspects that need to be improved and strengthened. Strive to be more suitable for students' English learning needs and positive ideological progress.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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