

# English Language as Culture, Class and Power: Explaining the English as Medium of Education in the Education System of Pakistan

**Sayeda Mehwish Dildar**

Department of Education University of Sargodha, Pakistan

**Najam Ul Hassan**

Department of Communication Studies University of Sargodha Pakistan

**Goher Ali**

Ph.D scholar Department of Communication Studies BZU Multan

**Muhammad Sher Juni**

Ph.D scholar Department of Communication School of Multimedia Technology and Communication Universiti Utara Malaysia

## Abstract

*This paper is part of a doctoral research project titled “Ideology and Worldview in Textbooks: A Study of Cultural Aspects in ELT in Pakistan”. It deals with the Critical Discourse Analysis of English language textbooks published by Punjab Textbook Board and Oxford University Press (henceforth PTB and OUP) being taught at the secondary level in three different schools in the city of Multan in Pakistan. The former are taught in the state-run Urdu-medium schools and some of the private non-elite English-medium schools while the latter are taught in the elitist English medium schools. This paper critically analyzes the discourse of these textbooks to explore certain themes/messages related to the Pakistani and Western cultures. The findings suggest that in contrast to the OUP textbooks, the PTB textbooks only represent the indigenous culture, which could be linked to the difference in the worldviews of the products of these schools. The elite-school students unlike their state-run and non-elite school counterparts gain an easy access to domains of power via English and the Western culture. The English language and the Western culture distance the elite class from the other classes and bring it closer to the centre (West) which, in return, economically and politically helps it dominate and rule the lower and middle classes. The findings of this research will help the policy makers, textbook authors and ELT practitioners to*

*realize the politics of language textbooks, and, thus, seek to establish an egalitarian and symmetrical educational system.*

## Key words:

Ideology; discourse; culture; power ELT; worldview;

## Introduction

Textbooks usually do not remain limited to the realm of a specific subject. Being representatives of educational discourse, they can provide significant information about the worldview, socio-cultural practices and participation in society in broader terms (Santos 2006). Quite effectively, such information can be used not only to shape the learners’ mind sets; it can also function effectively for slotting the members of a society into different social classes. This paper deals with both the notions. It critically examines the English textbooks being taught in the lower, middle and elite-class schools at the secondary level i.e. 10th grade, in the city of Multan in Pakistan to discover the ideological themes embedded in their discourses about indigenous and Western cultures. There are three major types of schools in Multan: (a) state-run Urdu-medium schools (b) (private) non-elite English-medium schools and (c) (private and state sponsored) elite English-medium schools. Mostly the lower, middle and elite classes have to choose any one of

these schools for education due to various financial, social and cultural reasons. The children from the first two classes mostly go to government Urdu medium schools and non-elite English-medium schools respectively; whereas the elite class mostly and proudly chooses the elite English-medium school which, unlike their state-run and non-elite counterparts, charge a high fee structure to provide Western atmosphere and modern standards of education. Not surprisingly, the same standards completely exclude the working class and mostly the members of the middle class from the elite educational circles (Zubair and Yaqoob: 2008: 1).

The state-run and non-elite schools teach PTB English textbooks whereas an elite school teaches OUP English textbooks in Multan. The culture represented in the PTB textbooks is a far cry from the one portrayed in the OUP textbooks. The former one comes up with the indigenous culture, values, traditions, beliefs. Hence, it seems logical to conclude that the products of these schools harbor nationalistic, religious and patriotic tendencies. Conversely, the OUP textbooks being replete with the instances of Western values and less with the indigenous ones portray a different social world. Ironically enough, this indicates the learning of two different cultures: indigenous culture by the middle and lower classes and the western by the elite class. As cultures vary with regard to their respective values, therefore, the students being socialized into two different cultures through the textbooks are likely to adapt two different sets of values. In a sense, it then seems possible to restrict power to a particular class through a control over the means, for instance textbooks that disseminate culture. In the Marxist sense, economical power enables a social class i.e. elite class, to control these means of disseminating cultural values. Hence, Western values are cherished and disseminated mostly in the elite circles

whereas the other social classes are not exposed to such values which are nothing short of a gateway to the domains of power. Bourdieu used the term “cultural capital” in "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" (1973). For Bourdieu, capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange, and the term is extended ‘to all the goods material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation, and cultural capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange that includes the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status. This—in the Pakistani context—is made possible by establishing different schools with different textbooks teaching different cultures – an ideologically *controlled* process of disseminating cultural values. And this is what the present research endeavors to prove that the representation of different cultures in the Pakistani textbooks function to distance the lower and middle classes from the elite class. It ultimately brings the latter one close to the center (West) and the former ones are further distanced from the centre. In a periphery like Pakistan, the centre then economically, morally and politically helps the elite class dominate or rule the *others* (Rahman 2002, 1999 & 1996; Phillipson 1992).

### **Textbooks as artifacts of culture**

John Gray regards ELT course books as cultural ambassadors. ELT materials.....for use in classrooms around the world are sources not only of grammar, lexis, and activities for language practice, but, like Levi’s jeans and Coca Cola, commodities which are imbued with cultural promise. In the case of ELT course books, it is the promise of entry into an international speech community which is represented in what tends to be very idealized terms (Gray 2000: 274). Phillipson (1992: 60) sees course books as agendas of ideologies which aim at making economy and dissemination

of culture or ideas. Thus he says that British course books are ‘designed to boost the Centre’s commerce with the Periphery and the dissemination of the Centre’s ideas and language’. Though he talks in the British context, it can be useful to apply his idea to other local English textbooks as well, for instance, Pakistani textbooks, for all are developed, revised and updated mostly by those in power. Moreover, his description of various institutions working as mechanisms under western powers to propagate a particular language and its culture worldwide at the cost of other languages and cultures may be seemed supporting Schiller’s definition of cultural imperialism – the global process of structural and ideological incorporation. Indeed it is only the English language ‘...in which this incorporation is taking place (form), and the structures and ideologies connected with English operate globally (content). If ‘Americanization’ or ‘Westernization’ is what Schiller is describing, then English is the key medium for this process’ (ibid.: 1992: 58-9). Modiano (2001: 340) observes that the formal education taking place in the educational institutions especially in the peripheral countries is likely to provide much exposure to English culture which, in turn, is a danger for the indigenous cultures and languages. Institutionalized English language learning based on culture-specific prescriptive norms, and supported by exposure to the language in a wide spectrum of activities, comprises a programme which can be perceived as being what Phillipson calls ‘an imperialist structure of exploitation of one society or collectivity by another’ (1992: 55). Such positioning supports a belief that the promotion of the English language undermines cultural diversity. English virtually Anglo-Americanizes the non-native speaker. Because English is such a dominant force in world affairs (and the bulwark of Western ideology), there is a danger that its spread dilutes (and ‘corrupts’) the distinguishing characteristics of other

languages and cultures. Hyde (1994, p. 296) observes that the threat the foreign culture poses is ‘the erosion of belief in the ability of native culture and language to deal with the modern world’ (cited in Gray 2000, p. 275). This forces them to bring some changes in the process of learning and teaching in the classroom as John Gray (2000, p. 275) exemplifies that ‘just as Coca Cola can be used in popular (if theologically unorthodox) religious ceremonies in Central America, so too are course books subject (at least in theory) to change in the language classroom’. Tariq Rahman (2002) analysis of language textbooks – including the English textbooks – notes that different textbooks represent different cultures. For instance, textbooks (in elite schools) written by foreign writers mostly represent the English culture and their counterparts (in government schools) written by local writers in Pakistan represent the indigenous one. His observation of the influence of these textbooks on their readers is as follows: ...the English-school students talked in English, very often in slangs borrowed from comic books, informally with each other. Their body language was different from that of other students. For instance, the boys did not shake hands in the manner of ordinary Pakistani boys.... While the latter put in much warmth in handshakes and shook every male’s hand, English-school products shook hands much more casually and often merely waved at people standing away. What is most important is that the products of English schools thought differently from their vernacular-school products; that there was a difference in worldview between them. Rahman then goes on to connect these cultural gains with ideology and worldview and in the final analysis to power. The dissemination of different cultures, to him, is the game of power.

### **Methodological perspectives**

*In this paper, data comes from the English textbooks published by OUP and PTB. In*

*analysis, the OUP textbooks will be referred to as OUP 1 and OUP 2 and the PTB textbooks as PTB 9 and PTB 10. Only the sentences related to cultural events, values and practices have been randomly selected from the said textbooks. Within the sentences, it focuses on how individual lexical items carry certain concepts related to a particular society or culture. These individual lexical items explicitly as well as implicitly create minor themes within sentences when read in a particular context. These sentences then further contribute to the over-all theme of a lesson. However, this paper deals only with the themes at the sentence level. It does not look at the overarching themes in the lessons. In order to deal with the implicit themes effectively, this research at some places employs some of the analytical devices selected from Fairclough's (2003) framework such as implication, assumption, representation, comparison, presupposition, difference, and evaluation. In this way, it seeks answers to the following questions:*

- a) Are English textbooks in schools a means of disseminating cultural ideologies?
- b) Do textbooks in different schools represent different cultures?
- c) Do these different cultures function to empower and disempower the social classes in society?

### **Analysis of the OUP and PTB English textbooks**

The PTB textbooks are a clear reflection of the Pakistani society including various religious, national and cultural events and practices to inculcate the learners with nationalistic, cultural, moral and religious fervor. Unlike them, the OUP textbooks are more replete with the instances of Western culture. This indicates the learning of a different culture i.e. Western culture by the elite school students in contrast to their counterparts from the state-run and non-elite schools students who are exposed only to the indigenous culture. The negative

consequence of this aspect – presenting Western life with its all liberties before the young elite-schools students – is that they are likely to regard the life presented in their textbooks as ideal in contrast to social life in Pakistan. The specimens of such a life may clearly be observed in the following lines randomly selected from different lessons in the OUP English textbooks. The present paper focuses on certain representations of the Western world in the form of practices, values and conceptions of life, to learn, what social themes or messages these instances impart to the learners from the elite class.

- The stooping figure of my mother... was the last I saw of my country home as I left it to discover the world. (OUP 1, p. 3, l. 1-3)
- It was a bright Sunday morning in early June, the right time to be leaving home. My three sisters and a brother had already gone before me; two other brothers had yet to make up their minds.

(OUP 1, p. 3, l. 9-12) The lines reflect the Western culture where leaving home is worth an adventure.

However, it is better to look first at some of the implicit messages of these lines before analyzing them from the point of adventure. This is because these social messages seem to accomplish or at least support the adventurous act of leaving home. They are: people in the West have full right to explore the world and decide independently the kind of life they choose; they have few restrictions over them but must also take responsibility for their decisions and actions; they care less for everything that may come in their way including the parents; their leaving home seems to be a sort of regular social practice and is regarded as discovering the world. Thus all of these social phenomena combine to offer an adventurous world to an individual in the West when he or she reaches a certain age. Interestingly, none of them matches with the social practices in Pakistan (see below) and, therefore, seem to be the sole characteristics of the Western culture.

The act of 'leaving home' has been positively equated with knowing about the world. Then, the use of certain lexical items and phrases such as 'bright Sunday morning' and 'early June' as 'the right time' for the adventure adds something to the expected charm and attraction of the adventure. Moreover, the 'bright Sunday morning' (as Sunday has its own value and reverence in Christianity) also gives a religious touch to this adventure – leaving home on Sunday is a good omen. All of these things indeed portray an adventurous and restriction-free world. In order to learn more about the underlying ideology of the lines, it is useful to compare the act of leaving home in the Pakistani context. The ideological load is inescapable for the simple reason that the explicit as well as the implicit meanings related to the act of leaving home are likely to influence the learners' ideas of life at home and in society. Let alone leaving parents, leaving home whether for adventure or for free life are nothing short of a social taboo for the majority of the Pakistanis. In effect, living with parents (with a purpose to serve them in their old age) is considered more important than living independently. In this context, the OUP textbooks then introduce a thing far removed from the local culture. However, it should not be assumed from the discussion that life is not, or cannot be, adventurous here. In fact, the things that make it adventurous are different. Similarly, the degree to which it is adventurous is also different. Therefore, Western specimens of adventurous life by excluding the indigenous ones. Along with the instances of an adventurous life, the textbooks are also replete with the instances of a liberal world. Once again, these examples come from the representations of the Western world. For instance,

• **Once a weak he and my grandmother would go into town for tea and afterwards to the cinema. (OUP 2, p. 50, l. 61-62)**

• **The car started. It was full of young white men. They were drinking. I watched the flask pass from mouth to mouth. (OUP 1, p. 160, l. 52-53)**

• **It was a favorite place for lovers and on summer nights their long whisperings floated among the branches and out over the currents. (OUP 2, p. 49, l. 21-24)**

In the lines above, the liberal themes such as going 'into town for tea and afterwards to the cinema', 'they (the young white men) were drinking', 'a favorite place for lovers' and 'their long whisperings' on 'summer nights' all function to create such a romantic world as the Pakistanis cannot dare to enjoy much of it publicly and openly. Although these activities are norms in the Western societies, they are social taboos in the Pakistani society particularly among populations belonging to middle and lower classes and living in rural areas. Though going for tea and cinema have found their way into our culture yet drinking and dating openly have not been accepted so far. So, what is not acceptable in our society has been presented as normative and acceptable practices in the textbooks of the elite school. This exposure to liberal and romantic culture is likely to lead them either to want to follow suit, or to disapprove of the social life in Pakistan, or to question it. In Pakistan people do go out on dates and have clandestine affairs without bringing it to the knowledge of their families and the wider community. Scholars like Rehman (2002) and Zubair (2003) have observed that although the themes of romantic love abound in Urdu and English Literatures, in reality romantic love and sex are taboos in Pakistani society. Zubair (2006) in a study of young women studying English Literature at Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, reported that several of the young women she interviewed had either dated or had boyfriends or felt the desire for romance but curbed it fearing the familial or societal disapproval. It is also important to mention that the elite-school students use English not

only in the schools but also at homes. Therefore, through protracted and simultaneous exposure to the English language and culture they may feel at home in the English language and its associated cultural values and distanced from their own indigenous culture as cultures tend to be embedded in their respective languages. Moreover, no two words in a language are ever exact synonyms, let alone in another language. For instance, the semantic and ideological underpinnings of the English words such as wine, drinking and dating are not negative whereas the Urdu words sharaab, sharaab peena, and wad-e-mulaqat karna carry negative implications. Thus the students of the elite English-medium schools who are not highly familiar with their indigenous culture embedded in Urdu, are, thus exposed to the liberal values of the English culture through ELT textbooks which may result in cherishing these values at the expense of indigenous cultural values. Along with the Urdu language, less exposure to religion Islam also accounts for their inclination towards the Western culture. The OUP textbooks, as mentioned above, contain only one lesson (only 1.44 percent) related to Christianity. It is about Christmas Eve and deals with it in a very liberal way as follows:

• **What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'me through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? (OUP 1, p. 107, l. 48-52)**

Here is a character of Scrooge arguing with his nephew over Christmas Eve. The Uncle's response to his greetings 'Merry Christmas' is not expected in the Pakistani culture even on non-Islamic events, let alone Islamic ones. The response is in fact a sign of his liberal attitude towards one of the most important religious events in Christianity i.e. Christmas Eve. The

response can also be taken as representation of a particular culture i.e. the Western culture which, unlike the Pakistani culture, offers much liberty to its people regarding religion. More importantly, this liberty allows one to look at life and religion from a pragmatic and/or casual point of view. Scrooge's question 'What's Christmas time to you' and then his own hasty answer to his question containing certain words such as 'paying bills without money' and 'finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer' represent a very practical approach towards religious festivals, which is certainly not spiritual. He clearly refers to the celebration or arrival of Christmas Eve in a lighter vein likening it to a business where people are only losers. Over all the lines portray such a world where religion plays a minor role in peoples' lives and where religion is a matter of individual choice. Ideologically, Pakistan is an Islamic Republic which was founded on the basis of religion, and, where religion Islam is central in shaping the lives and worldviews of a vast majority of people. Even more ideological is the inclusion of a non-Islamic event instead of an Islamic one in the OUP textbooks. Obviously, the purpose of these specimens of the

Western culture seems to produce such products that should be different from their counterparts in the state-run and non-elite schools. On a different note, our discussion now moves on to an analysis of the contents of the PTB textbooks and their representations of a different cultural world, which we hope will illustrate our argument. As mentioned above, an enough part of the PTB textbooks has been devoted to religion. At some places full lessons i.e. eight out of forty-three (3.44 percent) and at the other places contents within the lessons are related to Islam. Importantly, the exclusion of these contents is not acceptable at all in the society as most of the people particularly belonging to religious seminaries and parties hold demonstrations against it. This fact must help us assume that the Pakistanis as

Muslims hold extreme love and devotion for their religion. Apart from these statistics, several other instances present in the book also strengthen our point. For instance, both the textbooks (for 9th and 10th classes) start with the lessons about the Holy Prophet (SAW). It does not happen this time rather it has become almost a tradition as the previous books prove. Similarly, the Islamic teachings in regarded as the only way of their life in their culture. The PTB textbooks include various religious events that are common among the Muslims. Not only these events but also the way they are practiced help one know about the Pakistani society.

- **The Muslims (on Shab-e-barat) illuminate their houses and masjid (mosques). (PTB 10, p. 6, l. 12)**

- **The buildings are bazaars are illuminated (on Eid Milad-un-Nabi (the birthday of the Holy Prophet SAW)). (PTB 10, p. 7, l. 34)**

The word ‘The Muslims’ indicates that there is not any sort of division among the Muslims towards the celebration of the religious events. Rather the Muslims all over the world take equal part in celebrating these events. Moreover, the words ‘illuminate’ or ‘illuminated’ give insights into the mindset of traditional Muslims in Pakistan. It indicates that the Muslims regard their religious events very sacred and, therefore, celebrate them with full zeal and zest. This religious fervour presents them as enthusiasts. Moreover, they do not suppress and hide their emotions and feelings on such occasions. They rather express them overtly through illumination of houses, buildings and bazaars. The presence of ‘houses/bazaars and masjid’ in the sentences can be taken as metaphors for world and religion respectively. It means they go side by side in our lives.

Or there is a dialectical relationship between them – religion teaches them how to live a life and living a life accordingly is likely to result in a success in this life and the life

hereafter. Looking at it from another angle, people think of religion as a source of peace, tranquility, and satisfaction in life; hence, away from religion is to be away from a peaceful life. We can now clearly observe how the Pakistani and the Western cultures teach differently their people the ways to celebrate the religious events. In the former one, the importance of these events is much more than the latter one. On this basis we can make assumptions about the relative significance religion in both cultures. Arguably, the Western people keep their worldly affairs away from their religion as does the character of Scrooge in the lesson ‘Christmas Eve’ in the OUP textbooks. Whereas, in the PTB textbooks, even the celebratory practices of other than religious events show a certain influence of Islam. In this regard, though society also performs certain practices borrowed from the Hindu culture in real life, the textbooks indirectly disapprove these practices to urge the learners to practise only their own indigenous culture. **‘Oh well’ said the woman, ‘Silk dresses, sets of jewellery, pairs of shoes and sets of bed linen and a fully furnished house with a car’. The lady explained (to Farah) the dowry items that had just been displayed. (PTB 10, p. 82, l. 38-41).** It is from the lesson ‘Two Wedding Ceremonies’ that describes a wedding ceremony and the social practices the people perform to celebrate it. Right from the beginning, the lesson mentions display of ostentation and overspending on such occasions. For instance, besides what we see above there is a lot more in the lesson as follows:

- **The entire front of the house was illuminated with coloured lights and tube lights were erected all along the path way. (PTB 10, p. 81, l. 1-3)**

- **Near the house itself, rows of young girls dressed in gold and silver and bright eye catching colours, holding flower petals in baskets, were waiting for the Barat. (PTB 10, p. 81, l. 12-15)**

- **Each woman was loaded with jewellery around her neck, on her head, in her ears, on forearms and fingers. (PTB 10, p. 81, l. 16-18)**

To have a certain impact on the learners' perception, the textbook first describes the event of marriage and the way the people celebrate it. A tinge of satire goes along with it through a character named Farah who 'started feeling uncomfortable' and 'looked around to find a quiet corner' to indicate disapproval of what is going on :

- **Farah shut her eyes and rested her head on the back of the chair, 'Alas! If people here only remember how simply the Holy Prophet (SAW) married his daughter Hazrat Fatima (RA) to Hazrat Ali (RA).**
- **How simple, sacred and holy the ceremony must have looked', she thought to herself. (PTB 10, p. 82, l. 52-57).**

Assumingly, the textbooks consider simplicity, contentedness and frugality as elements of our culture. Obviously, then lavishness and ostentation are not the characteristics of this particular culture rather they are cultural imports from the Hindu culture as a result of living together for many centuries in the sub-continent in the past and extensively watching Indian movies or programmes on the cable. So far, we have seen how the PTB textbooks promote the Pakistani culture and exclude or disapprove the other cultures just like the OUP textbooks that mostly promote the Western culture. The following extract serves as a good example:

- **They (Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Fatima (RA)) found their only luxury in prayers. (PTB 10, p. 46, l. 16-17).**

In contrast to a Western couple going for tea and cinema in the lines above, we see here a couple preferring prayers to everything else as implied by the phrase 'found their only luxury in prayers'. In other words, the OUP textbooks show a western couple finding pleasure in the activities other than religious whereas the PTB ones show a couple finding pleasure only in a religious activity.

We do not imply that couples in the West do not offer prayers and in Pakistan they do not go out for tea and cinema. The point is to see which practices these textbooks ideologically include and exclude for the readers coming from different social classes. One similar instance given below is of a child who is supposed to act differently from that of a boy mentioned above in the OUP textbooks who left his home for the world. **Who sat and watched my infant head, When sleeping on my cradle bed And tears of sweet affection shed? My Mother. And can I ever cease to be Affectionate and kind to thee, Who was so very kind to me, My Mother. (PTB English 10, p. 88, l. 1-4 & 14-17)**

The first stanza of the poem 'My Mother' may be regarded to a certain degree as a generalized association of the attributes of a mother sitting, watching, lying (with her child) and loving her child. Somewhat same role of woman as a mother can also be observed in the lesson 'Leaving Home' in the OUP textbooks. However, the response from the child in the second stanza may arguably be culture specific. In the Pakistani context, the children usually internalize the traits of a typical mother or father from their tender age and are, therefore, supposed to act motherly as well as fatherly when they are grown up. This good return, however, is also under an obligation of their religion Islam that directs them to be obedient, kind and affectionate to their parents especially mothers. The underlying message for the learners is to be *devoted* as once their mothers were. This concept differs with the earlier one ( in OUP text) —where a boy feels free and confident in leaving home and mother for an adventure— in its expression of love to the mother which is never represented in the PTB textbooks. Generally, owing to economic constraints, people from lower and middle-classes in Pakistan prefer living with their parents since in these classes living in a separate



house is still a social taboo as it implies forsaking your parents in old age.

### Conclusion

The PTB and OUP English textbooks are, in fact, more about societal practices than the language itself. The Western society in the OUP books does not match enough with the indigenous (Pakistani) one in the PTB books. As the students of the elite class are not much exposed to the indigenous languages and values, they are likely to have a strong influence of such Western concepts as illustrated above. Hence, it may be surmised that English is much more than a language for these students. It is part of their bicultural identity, and, thus what comes along with it, is accepted and practised with pride. That is why the concepts and discourses of love and dating, listening to music, and drinking wine etc – commonly associated with the English culture – are exclusively linked with the elite class and may be seen as tokens of status. Not surprisingly, as English and its associated values and culture are regarded as a passport to modernity in the elite circles, the Islamic and nationalist values – are labelled and deemed traditional, old-dated and conservative. This indicates the alienation of the elite class from the indigenous culture and its respective values. On a different note, the readers of the PTB books for not being exposed to Western culture regard English as the language of non-muslims (Amin, 1998: 61) and its culture as contrary to Islamic as well as Pakistani values. They regard their counterparts as secular (nominal Muslims) and westernized. English is not their identity but they nevertheless continue learning it to get to domains of power or higher jobs. English education has been one of the means of creating and widening distance among the social classes in Pakistan; while bringing the elite class closer to the centre (West) in terms of its worldview, it has also distanced it from the worldview of the vast majority of indigenous population. It is important to

note that it is then not mainly the language rather the Western worldview and culture that matter and win the Western support for the elite class in dominating and ruling the *other* classes. In this regard, textbooks function as one of the key means in barring the middle and lower classes' approach to 'elaborated codes' (Bernstein, 1964); to language and *official* knowledge (Apple, 2004); and to *particular* worldviews and social practices which are a gateway to power.

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