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ABSTRACT

An analysis of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) textbooks published in the United States from the 1950s through the 1980s focuses on incidental but pervasive social messages contained in their content, including restriction to middle class populations and values, stereotyped sex roles, lack of visibility of minorities, negative messages about minority groups, and treatment of some socially sensitive topics such as divorce. Substantial changes, most of them positive, are found in the content of ESL textbooks over this period. Social and political factors influencing this change are examined, and additional goals held by some for these materials are discussed. It is concluded that, judged by today's standards, ESL textbooks of the 1950s can be faulted on grounds of both accuracy and fairness. However, some tension exists between accuracy and fairness in portrayal of members of society; when accuracy and fairness come into conflict, the tendency is often for accuracy to yield to fairness. Current textbooks portray U.S. society more accurately than in the past by including much greater social diversity. Contains 30 references. (MSE)

Thomas W. Adams

The Changing Social Content of ESL Textbooks in the USA

In many countries around the world and certainly in the United States, textbooks can serve as a "central guiding force" in the learning process (Skierso, 1991: 441). The importance attached to textbooks may explain in part the reason that controversies sometimes arise over their content. In the United States, one such controversy began in the 1970s and continues to this day. It centers around the subtle and incidental yet pervasive social messages that form one part of what many have termed the "hidden curriculum" (Frazier and Sadker, 1973).

One accusation stemming from this controversy is that the hidden curriculum historically has offered a view of U.S. society that is uniformly white and male-dominated (e.g., Janis and Franklin, 1972). For the next few minutes, I'd like to have a look at extracts from textbooks dating from the 1950s, which is the decade that first produced ESL textbooks of note in the United States (Howatt, 1984), and also from the 1960s and 1970s.

Textbooks Then

The first textbook is a reader entitled People in Livingston (Allen, 1953). Consider the following exchange between husband and wife:

> "Oh dear!" Mrs. Moore said one evening last spring. "It's time to think about spring housecleaning again. I don't mind cooking and washing dishes. I don't mind washing clothes. I don't even mind doing the housecleaning every week. I really don't. But I certainly wish I could find someone to help me with the spring housecleaning this year."
>
> "I wish you could, too," her husband said. "Why don't you try to find someone? There must be a few cleaning women in Livingston. What do the other women do about housecleaning?" (pp. 60-61)

In another passage, Mrs. Moore has gone off to a P.T.A. (Parent-Teacher Association) meeting. Her daughter, Shirley, and her husband are at home, engaged in a conversation that suggests trouble in paradise:

> Shirley: ...Poor Mother never has any fun, does she?
> Mr. Moore: I wouldn't say that. She's probably having fun right now, eating ice cream and cake with those P.T.A. women, and seeing what clothes they're wearing, and so on. You might not call it fun and I might not call it fun, but your mother seems to enjoy it.
> Shirley: That's not what I mean, Dad. What I mean is that Mother never has any excitement in her life. For instance, how long has it been since you invited her to go to a dance, or even to a movie?
> Mr. Moore: Well, ...

Shirley: You see? That's exactly what I mean. That's what my Family Relations textbook says. "Too often, marriage means the end of everything for the wife. No more excitement, no more dancing, no more fun...."

Mr. Moore: Shirley, why don't you study something important, like English? That Family Relations course is giving you a lot of foolish ideas.... Anyway, you know your mother doesn't like to dance.

Shirley: How do you know? She might like to if you ever asked her. She'd certainly like to go to a movie, if you invited her politely, and let her choose what she'd really like to do. This book says, "Too often, politeness, which ought to oil the machinery of marriage...."

Mr. Moore began to read his newspaper again. He pretended he was not listening. "Oiling the machinery of marriage!" he thought. "I don't know what's happening to education these days." But he was still thinking about the Family Relations textbook when he took Bender [the dog] for a walk before he went to bed. That book was full of foolish ideas, of course. But then, he didn't understand women. What men do? (pp. 96-98)

Everyone in Livingston is Caucasian, everyone is middle-class, and everyone for the most part appears content to live in a world where rules are set by men.

Another widely used ESL textbook from the 1950s is Taylor's Mastering American English (1956). Here is how two short reading passages begin:

Water is [a] necessity for sustaining life in plants and animals. Men have always been interested in [the] nature of water. (p. 187)

Dust is [a] great inconvenience to housewives. It is [a] difficult problem. Dust causes [a] housewife hours and hours of housework [a] week. (p. 187)

While men are loftily contemplating the nature of water in order to sustain life on this planet, women are doing battle against that difficult problem, that great inconvenience—household dust. Taylor's textbook depicts 91 men and one woman. Not a single character in this textbook is African-American.

From the early 1960s, let's look at two completion passages from Advanced English Exercises (Fuller And Wasell, 1961):

I am now waiting for my friend Alice, who was supposed to meet me here _____ two o'clock. We had planned to relax _____ lunch _____ a few minutes _____ beginning to study for our midterm examinations together. Midterms will begin _____ a little while, a week _____ Tomorrow, to be exact. All of mine will be finshed _____ a couple of weeks, _____ March 26.

Now I have been waiting _____ twenty minutes. Isn't it just like a woman to keep a man waiting? I am going to wait _____ 2:30. She should be here _____ then. If not, we will have to forget about relaxing and start studying _____ at once.

Well, here comes Alice. She looks angry. She says she has been waiting for me _____ one-fifty in the drugstore where we were going to eat. Oh, well, we will have to eat lunch _____ a few minutes and then go to study. (p. 23)

The reader is well into the passage before the narrator is identified as being male, the presumption apparently being that all people are male unless otherwise explicitly stated. Two other sexist attitudes are revealed in this passage: women don't value time as much as men do, and women react emotionally to events. In another exercise from the same textbook, women are characterized as witless and therefore helpless:

The majority of girls who (study, studies) physics, which (fulfil, fulfills) a three-year science sequence, seldom (realize, realizes) that (she, they) may have to apply (her, their) knowledge some day. Although the (information, informations) which a textbook (impart, imparts) about levers may seem irrelevant to students of French (literature, literatures), some facets of science (is, are) very practical. An electric iron marked A.C. may seem far removed from an assignment which is given for (homework, homeworks) about magnets, but a trained housewife can take care of minor electric difficulties independently of (their, her) husband. Thus, the study of a theoretical subject prepares (much, many) people for later emergencies. (p. 50)

Stereotyped sex roles continued well into the 1970s, as can be seen from the following extracts, the first of which comes from a textbook called Let's Talk (Finocchiaro, 1970):

Someone asks a young man what he wants to be.
What do you want to be?
I'm going to be a teacher.

Someone asks a young lady what she wants to be.
What would you like to do after you graduate?
I'd like to be a secretary.
I'd like to get married.

Many mothers want their sons to become President.
Would you like to be President?
Not at all. The job carries too many responsibilities.
Not for all the money in the world.

Two young women talk about their aspirations.
Have you decided what you want to be?
I've always wanted to be a [nurse]. What about you?
I think I'd like to teach. (pp. 62-65)

From a textbook called Conversation in English (Dobson and Sedwick, 1975: 80-86) come extracts titled "The Working Man", "The Handyman", "The Working Woman", and "Housework". The working man is a shoemaker, carpenter, milkman, tailor, butcher, and cook. The associated vocabulary teaches the reader to believe that it is men who build, assemble, repair, hammer, saw, hang, drill, shave, cut, carry, carve, and deliver. The working woman is a telephone operator, stewardess, secretary, typist, stenographer, saleslady, and waitress. The associated vocabulary teaches the reader to believe that it is women who type, take dictation, wait on others, make the bed, clean, wash, scrub, sweep, make meals, and iron.

From a textbook titled Access to English as a Second Language (Breckenridge, 1975) comes a passage that reveals existing social roles and then speculates on future ones:

> What do you remember about the Bakers? They live in Centerville, of course. Mr. Baker is an auto mechanic and Mrs. Baker is a housewife. They have four children. The children's names are Joan, Peter, Tom, and Carol. Joan is a secretary. She works in an office. Peter, Tom, and Carol are students. They go to school every day.
>
> Peter, Tom, and Carol all have plans for the future after they finish high school. Peter is going to study engineering. He is going to be an engineer. Tom loves music and likes to play the guitar. He is goping to study music. He is going to be a musician. Carol likes to paint and draw pictures. She is going to study art. She is going to be an artist.
>
> Jerry and Linda have plans for the future, too. Jerry is going to study law. He is going to be a lawyer. Linda likes people and wants to help them. She is going to study nursing. She is going to be a nurse.
>
> You remember Sharon Carter, too, don't you? She is Jerry and Linda's cousin. Her mother is a teacher in the Centerville High School. Sharon is just a small girl. She is five years old. She doesn't really have plans for the future, but she has dreams. She says she is going to study acting and be an actress. Maybe she will. Who knows? (p. 133)

The textbooks just cited are not unlike most others used in public and private schools across the United States at the time (U'Ren, 1971). In them, men led challenging, even exciting, and certainly satisfying lives outside of the home. In contrast, the lives of women outside of the home were largely restricted to a handful of occupations, such as that of elementary school teacher (but not college professor), nurse (but not doctor), secretary (but not boss), librarian (but not editor or author or publisher), and—of course—the telephone switchboard operator. Most women did not hold jobs outside of the home; they

were mere housewives—a term that has all but died and been resurrected as the somewhat more respectable "homemaker." Women and girls at least received treatment in textbooks. African-Americans, on the other hand, were virtually invisible—an unhappy circumstance poignantly described in the following words, written over thirty years ago:

> No Negro child ever romped with Spot, no Negro child ever performed a scientific experiment, no Negro child was ever portrayed as reading a book, hitting a baseball, [or] playing a musical instrument (Black, 1967:106).

When African-Americans were visible, their portrayals weren't always positive ones, as the following passage, taken from English as a Second Language, Phase Two: Let's Read (Samuelson, 1975), illustrates:

> Curtis Smith came from a Negro family of nine. At the age of sixteen, he was the second oldest child in the family. He came from the "wrong side of the tracks, " as the saying goes. The house where he lived was overcrowded, but clean. Mrs. Smith was an able housekeeper. She managed on very little income.
>
> Now Curtis was in trouble. Mr. and Mrs. Smith called on Mr. Campbell to seek counsel. Curtis was a friend of Mike Campbell. He attended Mike's high school when the busing was ordered. The authorities intended to offer equal educational opportunity to children of lower income households. This brought Mike and Curtis together. Both were on the varsity football team. They became friends quickly.
>
> Mr. Campbell listened attentively. He made many notes which he intended to use in court. He assured Mr. and Mrs. Smith that he was going to do all he could for Curtis. "Don't you worry, it isn't as bad as it seems." "The police were kind," Mrs. Smith said. "They allowed Curtis to call me." "That wasn't kindness, Mrs. Smith. The one phone call was his constitutional right," Mr. Campbell assured her.
>
> The warehouse guards pointed accusing fingers at Curtis. They testified that he was the man who broke into the warehouse. Those present in the courtroom whispered: "Somebody ought to do something about it!" "First they take over our schools, then they steal from us." "What's next?" "They should stay where they belong!" The judge rapped his gavel. Curtis' friends and neighbors maintained his innocence. They declared under oath that he was a good boy who never did wrong.
>
> The judge was confused. The court must know beyond a reasonable doubt that a man is guilty. He cannot be convicted otherwise. The judge thought of a plan whereby everyone could benefit. A thorough investigation of Curtis' personal activities was ordered. The court recessed for one week.
>
> When the court reconvened, the following was revealed by the investigation: When Curtis first came to Euclid High, his peers avoided him. Even when he was accepted as a tackle on the team, they did not treat him as an equal. They came from well-to-do families. He did not belong.

When the war broke out overseas, the team adopted an orphanage in a small town. Each month a contribution was sent there which helped to sustain the war victims. Curtis wanted to contribute. He began by breaking into small stores. The money which he received for the stolen goods went to the orphanage. He became one of the team.

"This was the reason why Curtis stole, your Honor," Mr. Campbell ended his plea. "We throw ourselves on the mercy of the court." The judge deliberated quietly with the prosecuting attorney. Moments later, the judge spoke.

"In view of the circumstances, we cannot take stern measures against the accused, Mr. Smith. We pass a suspended sentence, and place Curtis Smith in the custody of his parents." (pp. 50-51)

Despite its considerable shortcomings, this passage at least acknowledged racism as a profound social ill in the U.S. At the time, nearly all ESL texts were completely silent on the issue. Mr. Campbell, the lawyer who defended Curtis Smith, was introduced earlier in the textbook. His life and that of his family perpetuate many of the then-prevailing positive stereotypes of middle-class white America:

The Campbells are a typical American family. Mr. Campbell is a lawyer. He works in Houston, Texas. He is a good lawyer. Mrs. Campbell is a housewife. She likes what she does; her husband, the attorney, likes his work too....

The Campbells are preparing for a weekend in their country home. Mrs. Campbell buys groceries at the supermarket. Tim and Ann help their mother. Tim is eight years old and a third grader. Ann is in junior high school. She is fourteen years old. Together the two children get up early Saturday morning. They are making sandwiches for the family. Mike and Lucy usually help their father with other chores. At the age of sixteen, Mike is the oldest child in the family. Lucy is the youngest in the family. She is only six years old. (pp. 22-23)

The 1970s, however, was a decade in which a small number of ESL textbooks broke new ground in portraying social life in the U.S. The authors of one highly influential textbook noted in their preface that "most, if not all, ESL texts portray American society as faultless" and in every page following their preface the authors then set out to change all that. The textbook's title: No Hot Water Tonight (Bodman & Lanzano, 1975). In it, students are introduced to the underbelly of urban America by reading about the lives of the tenants in a dilapidated apartment building.

The owner of the building can only be described as greedy, uncaring, and detached: he isn't even able to remember the name of a tenant who has rented from him for 35 years. The superintendent is portrayed as lazy and shiftless: he makes repairs only when he wants

and when a bribe is offered. In one apartment lives a family of Cuban refugees who have mixed feelings about their adopted country. In another apartment is an elderly woman whose husband has died and whose grown children never visit. One day, she becomes ill and is rushed to a hospital where she is turned away because she can't produce evidence of health insurance. In a third apartment are two young professional women who stay behind locked doors most evenings because they are afraid to be out on the dangerous streets. One day, one of the women announces that she will wed her boss, a man whose wife has left him after fifteen years of marriage. In a fourth apartment live a single working mother and her teenage son who has a penchant for getting into trouble. It's appealing stuff in part because it seems so credible, as the following dialogue illustrates:

Man 1: Hey! Look at those two beautiful girls at the door.
Man 2: Wow! They're good-looking chicks.
Man 1: Let's go.
Man 2: Oh no. Cool it.
Man 1: Why? They're terrific.
Man 2: Yeah. So are their dates.
Man 1: Oh well, you can't win them all. There are still the two at the bar.
Man 2: Oh, them.
Man 1: They're terrible, yeah. But come on. It's only for one night, and it's getting late.
Man 2: I'm tired of waiting, too. Which one is yours?
Man 1: The short one with the long hair.
Man 2: Hell, no. She's for me.
Man 1: Oh yeah?
Man 2: Yeah. You can have the dishwater blond.
Man 1: Thanks a lot. You're a real friend.
Man 2: Come on. Take the blond.
Man 1: Forget it. I'm not interested. I'm going to have another drink. The bartender is looking this way. Go on. You can have both of them.
Man 2: All right, all right. Have it your way. You can have the fat one, okay?
Man 1: Okay. Let's get going. (pp. 88-89)

Other textbooks from the 1970s grappled—probably for the first time—with socially sensitive topics such as the house husband (a man who is married to a working wife and who stays home to manage their household) (Gallingane and Byrd, 1977) and divorce (Hendrickson and Labarca (1979).

Textbooks Now

Many—if not most—textbooks dating from the late 1970s onward cannot possibly be mistaken for their predecessors insofar as their social content is concerned. In many of them, women and members of minority groups are portrayed in widely diverse and non-

traditional ways in U.S. society. An example illustrating the contrast can be found in the following excerpts from the series Bridges to English, Books 2 & 3 (Woodford and Kernan, 1981). The first passage is a conversation between Ms. Harvey and Robert, both employees of Harvey Imports:

Ms. Harvey:	Robert, did you finish those letters?
Robert:	Yes, Ms. Harvey. Marie typed them this morning. I checked them. They're fine.
Ms. Harvey:	Good, Make three copies of each letter. And Robert, I need the Apex file. The Apex people are coming this afternoon.
Robert:	Yes, I know. Here's the file. (Book 3, p. 31)

There can be little doubt that an unequal status relationship exists between Ms. Harvey and Robert, and that she reigns supreme in this office. Another book from this series contains a reading about a Caucasian couple that begins like this:

> Mr. Wade doesn't feel very well. He's sick. His body feels warm and his eyes are red. His wife begins to worry. She calls their doctor and makes an appointment for her husband.
>
> The next morning Mr. and Mrs. Wade go to the doctor's office. The doctor gives Mr. Wade a physical examination. She examines his eyes, his throat, and his ears. Then she puts a thermometer in his mouth and takes his temperature. (Book 2, p.33)

A drawing of this scene appears above the reading: Mr. Wade's doctor is an African-American female. As this reading illustrates, textbooks in more recent years have begun to portray women holding diverse positions in the workplace, including airplane pilots (Adams 1987), bus drivers, armed security guards, shipping clerks, plumbers, construction workers, professional furniture movers, jackhammer operators, chemists, pharmacists (Molinsky and Bliss 1988), service station attendants, professional painters (of pictures, of course but also of walls), engineers (Sampson 1980), politicians, taxi drivers, veterinarians, and auto mechanics (DeFilippo and Mackey 1987). At the same time, girls are often depicted as aspiring to careers as astronomers, astronauts, carpenters, inventors, soccer players, university presidents (Sampson 1979), and fire fighters (Yorkey et al. 1979).

Discussion

How did we get from there to here? Part of the answer is that the content of textbooks has been influenced by political pressures operating within schools and

throughout society (Stern 1984). A look at several major political watersheds from the 1960s and early 1970s can help in understanding the context in which these changes occurred and possibly can shed light on some of their causes.

Perhaps the two most significant political events affecting education on the national level were the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passed one year later. The first prohibited discrimination in federally funded programs, while the second provided fistfuls of federal dollars to schools for the first time in over one hundred years. You have to keep in mind that 93-94% of all funding for education at the primary and secondary levels in the United States is raised both locally and at the state level. Historically, the role of the federal government in education has been marginal. The passage of these two acts, however, meant that the federal government at long last had the wherewithal to help redress some of the grievances of the nation's disadvantaged ethnic and racial minorities.

A decade later saw the achievement of most legislative goals set by the women's movement, including passage of the Higher Education Act of 1972 which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity receiving financial assistance at the federal level. In the same year, Congress amended the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to bring schools directly under federal jurisdiction in matters concerning sex discrimination.

Mindful of the shifting political winds and their probable consequences to textbook sale, a number of publishers developed guidelines in the 1970s governing the use of non-sexist language and portrayals of females in textbooks. First came Scott Foresman, which was soon followed by Harper & Row; Holt, Rinehart & Winston; Macmillan; McGraw-Hill; and Prentice-Hall.

At the same time, various professional organizations with national memberships passed resolutions deploring the use of sexist language and sex stereotyping in teaching materials and urging the adoption of more multiethnic materials in classrooms. The rationale for passage of these resolutions can be expressed in the following words, which in this case is taken from a resolution adopted in 1970 by the National Council of Teachers of English:

> Minority groups in the United States, especially non-white minorities—Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, Puerto Ricans, et

al.—suffer crippling discrimination in jobs, housing, civil rights, and education. And they continue to face a school curriculum that, for them, is culturally impoverished. Ironically, it is also a curriculum which, in a different fashion, cripples white students and teachers by denying them the opportunity to learn about the history and literature of other Americans who are nonwhites.

During the course of their education, students acquire more than skills and knowledge; they also find and continue to modify images of themselves as they form attitudes toward other persons, races, and cultures. To be sure, the school experience is not the sole force that shapes self-images, not does it totally influence one's attitude toward others. But to the extent that school does exert influence, it is essential that its materials foster positive student self-images deeply rooted in a sense of personal dignity. School materials should also foster the development of attitudes grounded in respect for and understanding of the diverse cultures of American society.

Although guidelines and resolutions such as this one helped increase public awareness and possibly helped foster social change, the influence of the executive branch of the federal government in interpreting compliance with statutes outlawing discrimination was arguably a much more important catalyst for change. One milestone was achieved in 1965 when President Johnson issued an executive order prohibiting federal contracts to be awarded to firms engaging in employment practices that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion. or national origin. Two years later, this order was amended to include the category of sex. Guidelines developed subsequent to the issuance of this order required firms to identify the ethnic backgrounds of their employees and report on the number that fell into officially designated minority groups. Stretching over the next five years, into the Nixon administration, the use of statistics in determining compliance became firmly established inside government as well as out. The effect of this practice was to instill a presumption of discrimination when numbers of officially designated minorities were not represented in a particular setting in proportion to their overall numbers in the general population (Sowell 1977).

Such a policy constituted a remarkable reformulating of the notion of non-discrimination. Prior to the 1960s, non-discrimination was widely interpreted to mean that people should be treated without regard to their race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. After the 1960s, non-discrimination meant that people should be treated with regard to these factors (Ravitch 1983).

Political activism in the 1970s at the federal level was accompanied at the state level by the adoption of standards for evaluating textbooks—often very explicit ones. More than twenty states—predominately in the South and West—have attempted to legislate

improvements in instructional materials by establishing committees vested with the power to vet all textbooks and produce a list of sanctioned books that local public (i.e. government) schools are permitted to choose from. Of these states, California and Texas are counted among the most influential because both of their markets are large and because their standards for governing the social content of textbooks are among the most exacting. For example, two sections of California's Education Code stipulate that males and females should appear in textbooks approximately evenly and that ethnic and cultural groups should appear roughly in proportion to their numbers in the general population with regard to portrayal, occupations, achievements, mental and physical activities, and traditional and non-traditional activities (California Department of Education 1979).

Meticulous observance of these standards can result in scenarios such as the one readers of English for International Communication, Book 2 (Yorkey et al., 1978) are treated to in the opening page, where the Thompson family is introduced. The Thompson's consist of mom, dad, and two children—one daughter and one son. On alternating days, mother and father cook breakfast, make beds, and cook dinner. On alternating days, daughter and son wash dishes. On Tuesdays, father and son go shopping for groceries. On Fridays, mother and daughter undertake this chore. On Wednesdays, father and daughter clean the house. On Saturdays, mother and son clean. The composition of the Thompson household (two males and two females) couldn't be more symmetrical, the division of labor couldn't be more equitable. It's a very statistically neat portrayal of family life. It is also a highly improbable one.

An illustration in the ESL series for children titled Reach Out (Addes, 1982) goes one step further. The setting is an urban street corner. A medical doctor is crossing the street at the intersection. A police officer is directing traffic. A pharmacist is talking to a butcher. A carpenter is talking to a gardener. A mail carrier is delivering letters. Two children are playing softball. Another child is riding a bicycle. The MD, the carpenter, and the biker are females: two are Asian and one is Caucasian. The police officer, the pharmacist , the mail carrier, and the butcher are males: three are Black and one is Caucasian. One of the children playing ball is a Black female; the other is a Caucasian male. Everyone is smiling.

The inescapable message imparted by portrayals such as these is that racial and ethnic integration is a fait accompli and that battles over sexism belong to some distant past. It's a politically correct portrayal of U.S. society. It is also an inaccurate one.

The use of numerical evidence to uncover sexism was promoted in an article written by Porreca (1985) and published in TESOL Quarterly:

> One of the most widely examined manifestations of sexist attitudes is omission. When females do not appear as often as males in the text (as well as in the illustrations which serve to reinforce the text), the implicit message is that women's accomplishments, or that they themselves as human beings, are not important enough to be included. (p. 706)

These assertions invite a response. Porreca appears to be unaccepting of numerical imbalances that may fall well within normal frequency distributions. The only way that authors can escape the terrifying accusation that they have produced sexist materials is if they count to make sure there is an evenly balanced representation of the sexes. This practice is now fairly widely observed in the U.S.—if not by authors, then by their editors.

Porreca's assertions also imply that under-representation or omission of members of any group constitutes an affront to that group. The only way to avoid giving offense is to include members from each and every group in proportion to their numbers in the general population. Such a practice is impracticable for at least two reasons.

First, the goal is simply far too ambitious. Groups in any society—even small and comparatively homogeneous ones—are always numerous and are always indefinite. Given these circumstances, exclusionary practices can never be eliminated; at best, they can only be reduced. In consequence, some groups will end up being included only because they are well-organized, very noisy, or both. Such has been the case in the U.S. with Native Americans, African-Americans, women, the elderly, gays, and the disabled. Scores of other disadvantaged and marginalized groups will probably continue to be neglected in large part because they lack sufficient political clout, public sympathy, or both.

Second, the goal is probably politically untenable. Conservatives would object to the portrayal of certain groups, and liberals would object to certain others. For example, the right can be expected to protest the portrayal of adult men and women unrelated by blood, marriage or adoption sharing the same living quarters—even though the latest U.S. census puts this particular group at over three million people. At the other end of the political spectrum, the left would challenge any portrayal of people practicing their religion—even though churches in the U.S. have well over 155 million members. These examples, by the way, are not drawn from thin air. They in fact form just two of the many

groups that are purposely excluded from nearly all ESL textbooks published in the U.S. today. The reason they are excluded, of course, is that their inclusion might be understood as an endorsement of behaviors, values, or beliefs associated with these groups.

Conclusion

The social content of ESL textbooks published in the U.S. has changed greatly over the past forty years, and many of us have no difficulty in concluding that overall the changes have been for the better. Judged by today's exacting standards, ESL textbooks published in the 1950s can be faulted both on grounds of accuracy and fairness. All of this calls attention to a dynamic tension that can and does exist between the twin educational goals of accuracy and fairness in portraying members of a society. It is easy to see that an accurate portrayal of certain aspects of society might not be a fair one, and a fair one might not be an accurate one. The changes that are visible and salient in today's textbooks are sufficient to warrant the observation that when accuracy and fairness do come into conflict, the tendency can be for accuracy to yield to fairness. Inaccuracies are forgiven because the goals of social engineering require textbooks to be fair (Hamlin, 1982). Even so, textbooks of today do portray U.S. society more accurately than did the textbooks of yesteryear in the sense that they include a much greater diversity of society's constituents. African-Americans are no longer excluded, and women are more visible than before.

The purpose of this paper is not to challenge the wisdom of the tendency to put fairness before accuracy, but rather to remind us of what is lost and what is gained when accuracy competes with fairness. That this tendency is relatively recent and as yet is incomplete should not obscure its significance.

The Social Content of ESL Textbooks in the USA

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