

# The Representations of Options and Cultural Elements in English Language Textbooks Used in Myanmar

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**Abstract** Language textbooks play an essential role in shaping learners' awareness of cultural diversity and orientation. This study examines the imagined community represented in the *English Text* series of the advanced level (Grade 9-10) used in Myanmar. Data are collected through images, reading passages and exercises in the two textbooks. Drawing on the theoretical framework of 'language ideology', the study investigates how the source culture and target culture are represented in the English language textbooks with regard to gender, occupation, ethnicity and nationality. Findings reveal that while covering the Myanmar people of diverse backgrounds, there is the gendered representation of males and females in that female characters are confined to family domains orienting to traditional practices whereas males are constructed as wiser and powerful figures. In terms of constructing the image of Myanmar, the poverty-stricken discourse is prevalent as a result of the national disaster and disease attack rather than the historical consequences of colonization and ethnic conflicts. Such disaster discourse is widely depicted and justified when it comes to the neighbouring countries such as China and Japan. In contrast to its neighbouring countries, the West-European and Anglophone countries are exclusively constructed with positive image by erasing the previous colonial control and hostility. Using the concept of language hegemony, it is argued that such erasure of colonial elements in Myanmar is embedded in the post-colonial process of legitimizing English as tourism-driven resource for Myanmar's economic development and regional internationalization with Southeast Asia. The study offers some implications for text design and recommendations for future research.

**Keywords:** *identity options, cultural elements, English textbooks, Myanmar*

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## 1. Introduction

A bulk of previous studies in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) confirm the strong relationship between language learning, culture and identity [1,2,3,4]. If the language learners do not learn the culture and cultural identities of target language's speakers, their learning outcome can be inevitably ineffective. Pavlenko has pointed out that without learning about the cultural identities of its native speakers such as race, ethnicity, religion and gender, the language learners might not have the access to interactional opportunities with other users, because "target language speakers may simply refuse to interact with L2 users who are perceived as incompetent communicators." [5]. Further, the lack of cultural competence and interactional opportunities might lead to feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability that exert negative impacts on language learners through reducing their achievement and satisfaction in the target language learning [5,6]. Therefore, it is extremely imperative and necessary for language learners to learn both target language culture and source language culture.

This not only ensures language learners to reach their expectant achievement in target language but also raises their awareness of their source language culture.

Foreign language or second language textbooks are not only a source of linguistic knowledge but are also considered as the main resource for learning different cultural aspects via English [7]. Textbooks are also regarded as the ideological reproduction in language and culture. Foreign language textbooks play a crucial role in shaping learners' awareness of cultural diversity. As a result, choosing good textbooks is extremely important. The Myanmar government has reformed its education in recent years and made a certain degree of progress.

A host of studies on language textbooks have emerged in recent years [8,9], however, there is little research about English textbooks used in Myanmar, a country which is colonized by the UK for over a hundred years and English has been adopted as the most important foreign language at key societal domains [10]. Thus, this study examines the imagined community represented in English language textbooks used for senior high school students (Grade 9-10) in Myanmar. In accordance with the previous studies on the language textbooks [8,9,11], the representations of both source and target culture in these

textbooks are analyzed in terms of the identity options and other cultural elements.

## 2. English Development in Myanmar

British took over the administration of Myanmar after three times Anglo-Burmese Wars in the 19th century so that Myanmar was forced to be one of the colonies of Britain. Myanmar was granted independence in 1948. At all educational stages, from the primary schools to high schools, the Myanmar Ministry of Education draws heavily attention on Anglophone culture. In Myanmar culture there is no distinct gender discrimination, which is accordance with the findings as below. Since Myanmar once was a British colony, English is the second dominant language in Myanmar. Teaching English has become compulsory because it is seen as a modern, globalized language with great importance and high values in various fields. Myanmar government puts its emphasis on developing national economy. In this regard, Myanmar's tourism has entered a prosperously developing stage.

Textbooks are the main teaching resource in Myanmar education. Myanmar Ministry of Education has the responsibility and right to design and decide which textbook that language learners should use. Teachers and learners have no choice but only to convey and receive what is presented in the textbooks. Thus, examining English textbooks used in Myanmar schools is vital to show how the Myanmar Ministry of Education strikes a balance between target language and source language.

This study will be structured as follows. It first introduces research problems and explain why current studies are needed. After the general background of the Myanmar context and English language education, the second part is the literature review, which involves the theories, methodologies, emerging themes on English language textbook. It also reveals the literature gap. Then the research methods are illustrated. The findings are concluded from representations of identity options about Myanmar and foreign imagined communities, and representations of target and source cultures. The last part is implications and some recommendations for future research.

## 3. Previous Studies on Language Textbooks

Textbooks are the essential part of the system of education and the teaching material used in the classroom. Textbooks gives cohesion to the language teaching and learning process by providing direction, support and specific language-based activities aimed at offering classroom practice for students [12]. For instance, Dong (2019) explores the Cambodian and foreign characters' identity options and cultural elements presented in English textbooks employed in middle school. Findings reveal an oversimplification in diverse identity options and unbalanced exposure of cultural diversity as well as an over-representation of Anglophone and postcolonial culture in Cambodia. In Duan's article (2019), she reveals

identity options in Bangladeshi English textbooks are diversified, whereas foreigners are Anglophone-centered. Speaking Bangla is a symbol of linguistic nationalism. Anglophones are constructed as ideal English speakers. Bangladeshi women's achievement is highlighted and Muslim is weakened in representation. Similarly, Duan (2020) explores eight textbooks of Boya Chinese series used by international students in China. The study uncovers Chinese males tend to find decent jobs with high reputation, while females Linguistic representation in China is also simplified. An internal linguistics hierarchy is produced as Hanyu with higher prestige than other minority languages. Han-oriented monoculturalism emerges [13]. English hegemony represents as the USA and the UK as ideal destinations for better education and jobs.

A nation is considered as an imagined community because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them [14]. In light of individuals' various social positions and backgrounds, they might have different imagined communities. These positions are not fixed. Representations of gender identity in textbooks must be considered as the most prominent topic of the study.

Culture is membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history and common imaginings [15]. Culture and language are closely related. Without the knowledge of target culture, students are unable to learn language well. Good English language textbooks should consider to balance both target and source language.

If there are no well-organized textbooks for teachers and students, their language learning will be negatively affected. Evaluating the content of language textbooks is important [16]. Bin Obaid (2016) states that "the evaluation of textbooks to identify any weaknesses and strengths of the textbooks can help in the selection process of a textbook with the scope to minimize the negative effects and maximize the positive ones." [17].

Oversimplification or misrepresentation of the source and target culture may lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication of young generations. The study aims at evaluating the identity options and culture representations and what ideologies embedded in English textbooks.

Mohamed (2014) defines hegemony as "power and domination in the domains of economics, politics, cultural life and ideology within a certain society or across societies" [18]. Fairclough (1995) further states that hegemony refers to power which is exercised through ideology rather than through physical force [19]. From this we will know that hegemony generates from ideologies such as ideas, principles, beliefs and so on. Language conveys ideologies, and ideologies shape hegemony. So when evaluating language textbooks, attention should not only be paid to the content but also the message they try to convey, the impact they may have on language learners.

Based on the review above, it is fair to say that language textbooks constitute a key site for ideological reproduction. The language textbooks act as implicit policy conveying hidden ideologies. How do ideology and

hegemony affect identity and cultural representations in these textbooks? To answer this research inquiry, two research questions are to be explored in detail:

1. What are the identity options of Myanmar and foreign characters produced in *English Text* series?
2. How are the cultural elements related with Myanmar and foreign characters represented in these textbooks?

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Material Selection

Before 1886, the literacy rate of Myanmar was 85%, but in colonial period the percentage fell sharply to 35%. To deal with this problem, in 1973 the Ministry of Education of Myanmar introduced a 3Rs (Read, Write, and Arithmetic) programme for the illiterates. In Myanmar, English, Myanmar and Mathematics are three compulsory subjects. Ten points in education policy was released in March 2011, the first regular session of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. Ex President U Thein Sein proposed that one task for upgrading of national education is to collaborate with international and local organizations including the UN, INGOs and NGOs. As such, English is becoming a key enabler for Myanmar students' academic success and employability.

Judging from the cover of the *English Text* (see Figure 1), this *English Text* series are issued by Myanmar Ministry of Education. As a consequence, the current selected language textbooks are authoritative and meet standards and requirements of basic education curriculum and syllabus. To upgrade the high school curriculum to international level, a seminar was held in April, 2006. According to the Conference on Development Policy Options held in February, 2012 in Nay Pyi Taw, currently, the modified high school have been implemented since 2008-09 AY. It fits the basic education curriculum syllabuses and is acknowledged by textbook committee. It also contains consistent stages for learners at elementary, quasi-intermediate, intermediate and advanced levels.

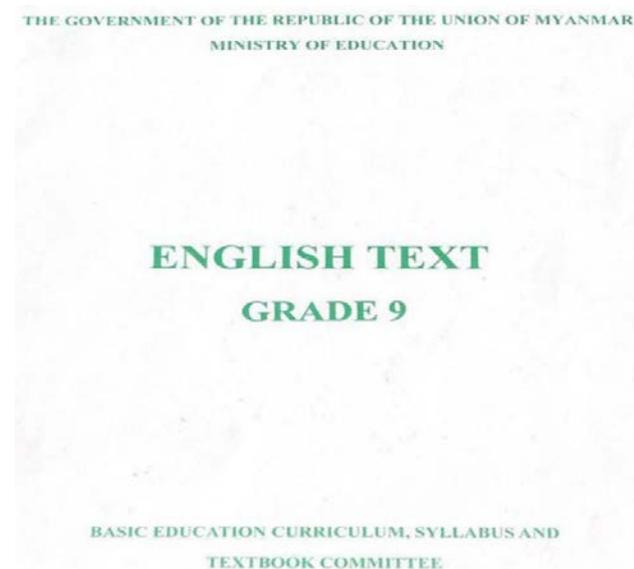


Figure 1. The cover of *English Text* Grade 9

### 4.2. Data Analysis

Data are collected from the images, reading passages and exercises from the textbooks as well as interviews with Myanmar majors. Following the previous studies on language textbooks [8,9], Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is used to see how language is discoursed as part of social practice [20,21,22]. Fairclough's CDA with a particular focus on the relation of how power is reproduced through linguistic and cultural representations. With CDA as the main analytic framework, content analysis and thematic analysis are applied. Content analysis is applied in this study for dealing with different types of English learning materials in the textbooks and finding out the potential identities and ideologies emerging from these data. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes with qualitative data. From the analysis, we will know what is included or excluded and how certain social categories are associated with wider social discourse.

### 4.3. Limitations of the Study

This study as many studies is not free from limitations. Textual analysis is a subjective and selective procedure. The study explores *English Texts* in Myanmar for Grade 9-10. However, there are also other sets of English textbooks applied in Myanmar high schools. Furthermore, Myanmar has 7 provinces and 7 federal states. According to interviews, Myanmar majors report that there is no acknowledged English textbooks in Myanmar. Therefore the researcher chooses *English Text* series as research target. Future research can select other types of English textbooks in Myanmar to examine the representations of identity options and cultural elements.

## 5. Findings:

### 5.1. Identity Options in *English Text*

#### 5.1.1. Characters from the Source and Target Culture

This section begins by investigating the basic division between Myanmar and foreigners.

Table 1. Character distribution for the Grade 9-10 of *English Texts*

Types of characters	Myanmar characters	Foreign characters
Number	97	53
Percentage(N=150)	64.7%	35.3%

Table 1 shows there are 150 characters in the English textbooks for Grade 9 and 10, within 97 Myanmar characters and 53 foreign characters. It is clear that the representation of Myanmar characters (64.7%) is higher than that of foreign characters.

From the perspective of identity option, there are more Myanmar characters than foreign characters. The imbalance in representing identities may mislead language learners.

#### 5.1.2. Gender

In terms of distribution, Table 2 shows that Myanmar male and female share almost equal numbers (48 male and

40 female) in the textbooks. Women in Myanmar enjoy equal rights with men in politics, education, economy and social status according to the law, which is represented from the gender distribution. To contrast with, in the case of foreign characters, the number of foreign male characters (38) is over two times than that of female characters (15), which means there is an obvious imbalanced gender distribution and under-presentation of foreign female characters.

**Table 2. Gender distribution for the Grade 9-10 of English Texts**

Gender	Myanmar male	Myanmar female	Unknown	Foreign male	Foreign female
Number	48	40	9	38	15
Percentage (N=150)	32%	26.7%	6%	25.3%	10%

### 5.1.3. Occupations

**Table 3. Occupations of characters for the Grade 9-10 of English Texts**

Myanmar characters				Foreign characters			
Occupations (52)	Male (59)	Female (35)	Undefined (88)	Occupations (24)	Male (26)	Female (5)	Undefined (27)
Actor	4	-	-	Watchman	1	-	-
Director	2	-	-	Model	1	-	-
Professor	-	-	1	Doctor	2	-	5
Police officer (Policeman)	4	-	1	Painter	1	-	-
Teacher	-	1	16	Artist	-	2	-
Student	33	24	8	Servant	1	-	-
Secretary	1	1	3	Tutor	1	-	-
Writer	-	-	2	Philosopher	1	-	3
Bus driver	-	-	1	Surgeon	-	-	3
Scientist	-	-	5	Physician	-	-	1
Soldier	3	-	1	Scientist	-	-	3
Tailor	-	-	2	Pope	1	-	-
Mule-driver	-	-	1	Servant	-	-	2
Doctor	1	1	4	Poet	9	2	2
Headmistress	-	1	-	Dancer	1	-	3
Thief	-	-	3	Professor	1	-	-
Waiter	2	-	-	Musician	1	-	-
Shopkeeper	-	-	1	Medico	1	-	-
Operator	-	-	1	Astrologer	1	-	-
Workman (Worker)	-	-	4	Teacher	-	1	1
Actress	-	3	-	Student	-	-	4
Fireman	-	-	2	Captain	1	-	-
Advertiser	-	-	2	Director	1	-	-
Journalist	1	-	-	Sailor	1	-	-
Priest	1	-	-				
Headmaster	4	-	-				
Salesgirl	-	1	-				
Peasant	-	-	1				
Doorman	-	-	1				
Manager	1	-	-				
Hotel staff	-	-	2				
Staff	-	-	3				
Painter	-	-	1				
Engineer	-	-	1				
Financier	-	-	1				
Servant	-	-	1				
Attendant	-	-	1				
Artist	-	-	3				
Comedian	-	-	1				
Magician	-	-	1				
Violinist	-	-	1				
King	-	-	3				
Farmer	-	-	2				
Nurse	-	1	-				
Housewife	-	1	-				
Film star	-	1	-				
Assistant	1	-	-				
Athlete	1	-	-				
Principal	-	-	1				
Songwriter	-	-	2				
Researcher	-	-	2				

Table 3 illustrates the occupations of the Myanmar and foreign characters in *English Text* for Grade 9-10. There are 52 occupations assigned to Myanmar characters and 24 occupations to foreign ones. Among Myanmar characters, the occupational distribution almost covers all social classes, varying from scientist and doctor to mule-driver and thief. In terms of gender, Myanmar male characters constitute more occupations than female characters. The gender distribution of occupations is extremely unequal with foreign male having 26 but female characters only having 5. Regarding the occupational positions of foreign characters, the number is sharply lower. However, concerning the job positions available to foreign, foreigners seem to hold decent jobs such as Pope, philosophers, scientists and doctors with middle- or upper-class background. It is true that some occupations like babysitter and servant are allocated to foreign characters, but those lowly-skilled jobs are actually not based on the real life figures but derived from the novel (like *Wuthering Heights*) and other folk tales. In contrast, many occupations offered in Myanmar represent working or even low class.

#### 5.1.4. Ethnicity and Nationality

Table 4. Origin, nationality and gender of foreign characters

Origin	Nationality	Male	Female
Europe	British	18	4
	American	5	5
	Italian	3	-
	Roman	1	-
Asia	Pakistan	5	-
	Brunei Darussalam	-	-
	Cambodia	-	-
	Indonesia	-	-
	Laos	-	-
	Malaysia	-	-
	Myanmar	-	-
	The Philippines	-	-
	Singapore	-	-
	Thailand	-	-
	Vietnam	-	-
	China	1	-
Undefined	Undefined	6	6

From Table 4, foreign characters represented in the *English Texts* are Anglophone-centered. Among them, "British" takes up the biggest proportion of nationality distribution. The diversity of English speakers has been oversimplified and confined to those from inner circle countries such as the UK and the USA. Other English-speaking countries are invisible or erased from the English textbooks. This extremely imbalanced representation of foreign characters indicates linguistic and racial hierarchy with White British/American English speakers as ideal target interlocutors for Myanmar students. Such imbalanced distribution of foreign countries not only reproduces the Anglophone-centered world but also marginalizes the cultural diversity of other countries.

## 5.2. Cultural Elements in *English Textbook*

### 5.2.1. Gendered Aspects of Culture

As indicated in the Table 3, the number of occupations

for Myanmar males is much more than that of Myanmar females. In terms of the occupation allocation, there is a distinct gendered representation for what Myanmar males and females are supposed to do. In particular, Myanmar women are expected to prepare food for their families, engaging in household activities.

a. "When I finished cooking, my sister had ironed the clothes." (Page 16, Grade 9)

b. "My mother made our clothes on a sewing machine." (Page 52, Grade 10)

c. "Mother cooks something special for us at weekends." "Ohnmar does the washing up; otherwise, her sister does."

"Mother is in the kitchen. If not, she is in the garden." (Page 74, Grade 9)

"My sister cleans our room every weekend." (Page 75, Grade 9)

Women are shaped as slow-responded, beauty pursuers and accidents witnesses.

a. "Every woman wants to be beautiful." (Page 23, Grade 10)

b. "Girls use certain shampoo or cosmetic in order to become beautiful." (Page 80, Grade 10)

c. "She drove the car too fast to avoid the collision." (Page 83, Grade 10)

d. "Nway Nway's behaviour during the journey was very annoying. Yes, everyone was annoyed with her." (Page 101, Grade 10)

e. "As her thought were scattered, she could not think of the solution to the problem."

"Mother was terrified to see the man beating the dog to death." (Page 73, Grade 10)

f. "My sister and I cannot answer this question." (Page 77, Grade 10)

To contrast with, male's image is wiser than women. "Our father is so wise that he can solve most of our problems." (Page 83, Grade 9). "He is young, good-looking, and also very rich." (Page 28, Grade 10).

### 5.2.2. Localized Myanmar Food

In contrast to the implicit representations of culture, there is explicit instruction with regard to other aspects of Myanmar culture. Myanmar cuisine, Myanmar instrument, Myanmar history, Myanmar costumes, places of interests of Myanmar and some endemic diseases.

This common food culture, sustained in embodied forms via food habits and culinary practices' plays an important role in constructing a common regional identity that sits outside colonial and post-colonial national identities [23]. Localized food makes Myanmar united by their shared taste. Throughout two books, "mohinga" is the representative of Myanmar cuisine. Mohinga is rice vermicelli in fish soup, which is considered by many to be the national dish of Myanmar. Mohinga is a common cuisine, which can be seen in most parts in Myanmar, such as in major cities, street hawkers and roadside stalls. It is usually served as breakfast, now available as "all-day cuisine".

Mohinga also appears many times in other grade's textbooks (see Figure 2). Besides mohinga, rice is another food which appears pretty much. Here is an example of English textbook for Grade 9 on the page 56 (see Figure 3).

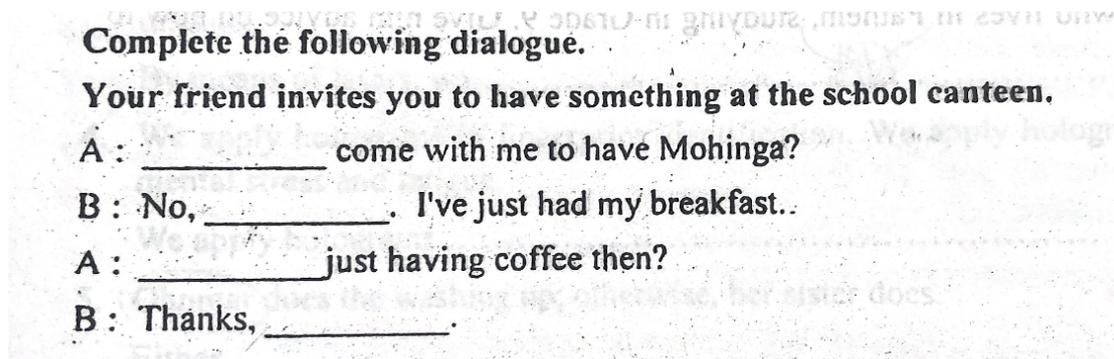


Figure 2. Page 76, Grade 9

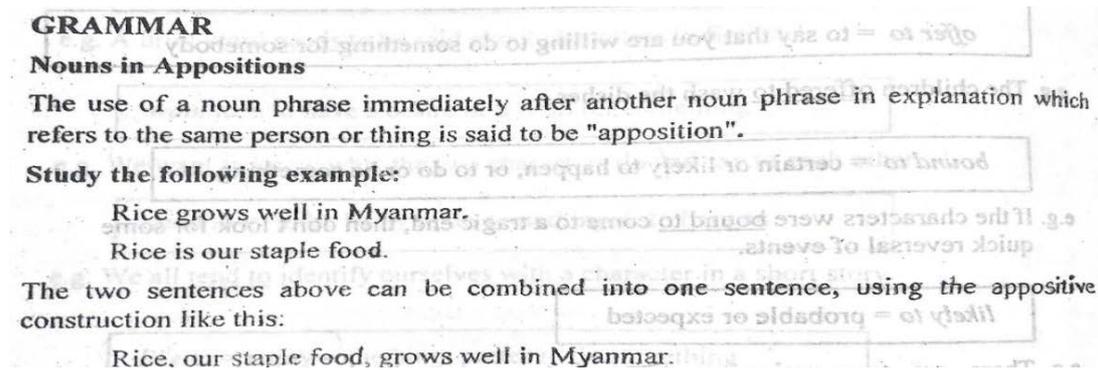


Figure 3. Rice as the staple food

Figure 3 states that rice is Myanmar's staple food. What's more, it grows well in Myanmar. Because of British colonization, within the influence of British eating habits, Myanmar people not only enjoy rice but also like bread and coffee and milk tea. During the colonization, the British brought modernization and food to Myanmar. Myanmar people enjoy bread, cake, pudding accompanied by coffee or milk tea served as breakfast [24]. In Grade One *English Text*, one chapter introduces food, among which bread, coffee is pictured. With the influence of the British, Myanmar people usually have high or low tea at about 3 p.m. When drinking tea, Myanmar people love to add some milk or sugar, which gradually becomes Myanmar milk tea.

"If she drinks too much coffee, she will not feel calm." (Page 55, Grade 10)

"I'll just have a cup of coffee, please." (Page 77, Grade 9)

### 5.2.3. English for Tourism Development

Myanmar enjoys rich natural resources: tropical and subtropical climate, high forest coverage, various terrain, precious jade resources, rare flora and fauna. Another attractive point for tourists coming to Myanmar is its long coastline. Myanmar has 3200-kilometer coastline. As it represents in the *English Text*, Myanmar has many beautiful beaches. Besides natural resources, Myanmar has long history and ancient places of interest. Buddhism is the national religion of Myanmar. There are numerous pagodas in Myanmar.

42 nationalities live together, giving birth to different customs, festivals, ethnic costumes and music. Even though in *English Text* (Grade 9-10) nothing about customs is mentioned, rich human landscape and natural

resources serves as a prerequisite of the development of Myanmar tourism. Tourism has become a new power to develop its national economy.

To encourage people to travel in Myanmar, government does make effort. For example, in 1990, Myanmar government issued and enforced the first tourism law, providing lawful protection. What's more, setting up ministry of tourism to manage and supervise tourism market. Second, Myanmar accepts arrival visa, simplifying the procedure of getting a visa. For the lack of development of national economy, Myanmar government encourages private and foreign investment in tourism. Third, Myanmar government and ministry of tourism enhance cooperation with other countries, especially with ASEAN countries, which can be seen from *English Text Grade Ten*. The last two units are about travel in Southeast Asia. By doing this government obeys the *Charter of ASEAN Countries*. At the same time Myanmar carries out tourism foreign publicity. Some Myanmar students will be sent abroad to receive professional training about tourism.

Politics has great influence on the development of tourism as well. In spite of government positive policies, such as *One Belt One Road* initiative, nation's stability and safety encourage more people to travel to Myanmar. Myanmar's tour facilities and supporting services can't satisfy tourists' high standard need. And the government is filling the gap to develop tourism eventually to support economy.

Places of interest is also a central aspect of the source culture. Bagan is an ancient city in Upper Myanmar, and the description about it are numerous. Here is an example of requirement of writing a passage about Bagan (see Figure 4).

**WRITING**

A. Using the information given in the table, write a short paragraph on: "Bagan – The Ancient Capital of Myanmar".

Location	about 5 kilometres south of Nyaung U east bank of Ayeyarwady river, Central Myanmar
Area	16 square miles (ruins of Bagan)
Climate	hot and dry
Historical facts	the seat of the ancient Myanmar kings dynasty from 11 <sup>th</sup> to 13 <sup>th</sup> Centuries the first Myanmar Naingan founded by King Anawrahta the sacred Pitakas brought from Thaton in 1057 the seat of serious study especially of the sacred Pali language
Famous pagodas and monuments	Bupaya Pagoda, Ananda Temple, Thatbyinnyu Temple, Dhammayangyi Temple, Shwegugyi Temple, Upali Thein, Saraba Gateway, etc.
Other interesting places	Bagan Archaeological Museum, Myanmar handicraft shops, antique shops, etc.

Figure 4. Page 105, Grade 10

Bagan is the capital of the first Burmese empire, which is located in the central plains of Myanmar, on the eastern bank of the Irrawaddy river. Considered as the heart of Myanmar of ancient times, Bagan is home to temples and buildings built from the 11th century to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. More than 2,000 pagodas and temples can be found in Bagan. Among all the cities in Myanmar, Bagan is the most ideal destination for tourists. Bagan has a dry climate with no monsoon season. It can receive visitors all year around, therefore, in *Unit 12 Travel in southeast Asia*, Bagan is picked up as a target of introducing tourism. In Bagan, many handicrafts shops surround the temples. Those handicrafts reflect the essence of ancient Myanmar culture and traditions.

#### 5.2.4. Representations of Myanmar Cities/ States

As for representing its national images, namely, Yangon and Mandalay are chosen. Yangon is the former capital of Myanmar and still the largest city of Myanmar within the population of 4 million. Yangon offers diverse cultures and communications because of people's settlement and religions. It is the main seaport and the

centre of business. Mandalay is the second largest city in Myanmar, which serves as the cultural centre of Myanmar. Today Mandalay is home to Buddhist monasteries.

In *Figure 5*, some exercise can prove that Yangon and Mandalay are chosen as the main cities in Myanmar. "Kaung Kaung lives in Yangon. His brother also lives in Yangon. Ko Ko and Mg Mg visited Mandalay last month." (Page 6, Grade 9).

About mass media, MRTV is the only icon that appears. MRTV is abbreviation of Myanmar Radio and Television, which is a free-to-air channel to broadcast local news. "Yesterday I met a man \_\_\_\_ daughter works at MRTV." (Page 66, Grade 10).

Shan is the only minority-centered state that is introduced in *English Text* (see *Figure 6*). According to Collins Dictionary, Shan state refers to administrative division of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, occupying a plateau region (Shan Plateau), inhabited by Shans. Shan state is one state of 14 states. With the area of 155, 801 square kilometers and about 6.3 million population (in 2019), it is the largest and most populated state in Myanmar.

4. Kyaw Thu is an actor. He is also a director.
5. I like listening to music and watching TV.
6. Kaung Myat lives in Yangon. His brother also lives in Yangon.
7. Ko Ko and Mg Mg visited Mandalay last month.
8. My sister has been to London. She has been to New York.
9. Tourists like to visit Bagan and they like to visit Inlay Lake, too.
10. Gear-wheels can be found in an ordinary watch and in a hand-driven sewing machine.

Figure 5. Page 6, Grade 9

**B. Degrees of comparison (2)**

I. as ---- as ← → ----er/more ----- than ← → the --est/most

Study the following example.

The Shan State is **the largest** state in Myanmar.

The Shan State is **larger than** any other state in Myanmar.

No other state in Myanmar is **as large as** the Shan State

**Exercise : Finish each sentence in such a way that it means exactly the same as the sentence that is given.**

1. Yangon is the most populated city in Myanmar.

Yangon is more \_\_\_\_\_.

No other city \_\_\_\_\_.

Figure 6. Page 113, Grade 10

As the capital city of Shan state, Taunggyi is chosen to represent Shan state in the textbooks.

In Figure 7, "She comes from Shan state and has a very fair complexion." Among all states, these textbooks select Shan state as the representation of Myanmar. This may cause other states to be marginalized. Shan people are racially categorized as people who don't wear "normal" Myanmar look. Shan people are implicitly considered as "foreigner" because of fairer outlook. Shan state borders on Yunnan Province, China. Because of its special weather and location, intermarriage with Chinese, Shan people look fairer than other people. By fair complexion Shan people are excluded.

Buddhism is the national religion in Myanmar. Myanmar is predominantly Buddhist, at 89.2% of the population [25]. Ancient pagodas are the proof of the rich cultural heritage of Myanmar and is archaeological treasure of Asia.

In *Unit 13 Travel in southeast Asia(ii)*, Myanmar presents itself as follows: Myanmar is an agriculture country, but it still encourages to develop tourism. The textbooks use Bagan as an ideal destination for tourists all over the world (see Figure 8). To attract more tourists, besides Bagan, more tourist attractions and many beautiful beaches are introduced (see Figure 9).

5. She has just recovered from malaria. Her complexion is rather \_\_\_\_\_.

6. She has beautiful \_\_\_\_\_ eyes.

7. He is an athlete and has \_\_\_\_\_ shoulders.

8. She has a round \_\_\_\_\_ and looks very sweet.

9. I like to wear large blouses because I am \_\_\_\_\_.

10. She comes from Shan State and has a very \_\_\_\_\_ complexion.

Figure 7. Page 81, Grade 10

**Myanmar**

Myanmar, known as "The Golden Land", is famous for its glittering pagodas, vast tracts of timber forests and huge mineral resources, as well as for the hospitality of its people. Nay Pyi Taw is the capital city of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The commercial city is Yangon. One can find many famous historic pagodas such as the Shwedagon, museums, parks and many places of recreation.

The Ayeyarwady river is the life-blood of the Myanmar people. Along its banks stand many ancient capitals of Myanmar kings – Tagaung, Mandalay, Amarapura, Sagaing, Inwa, Bagan and Pyay, where many existing old monuments and buildings reveal the greatness of their time of glory. Among others, Bagan with its thousands of old pagodas is recognized by the world's travellers as one of the world's wonders. This 1,200-year-old city, with over 2,000 ancient pagodas is proof of the rich cultural heritage of Myanmar and is one of the archaeological treasure houses in Asia.

Figure 8. Page 106, Grade 10

Other major tourist attractions in Myanmar are long, white, sandy and unspoiled beaches such as Ngapali, Maungmakan, Chaungtha, Kanthayar, and Ngwesaung, where one can study marine life, and enjoy peace and tranquility, as well as view nature at its best.

Figure 9. Page 106, Grade 10

Another symbol of essentialism in these textbooks is the representation of some endemic diseases. In the English textbook for Grade 10 Unit 11, mosquito is regarded as the enemy. Mosquitoes are the most highly developed insect bloodsuckers and are carries of several very serious diseases in Myanmar, such as yellow fever, encephalitis, dengue fever, and malaria. This passage introduces three main endemic diseases and their treatments and prevention. For instance, during the mosquito season, people should wear protective clothing and apply mosquito repellent to skin. Using mosquito netting covers sleeping infants (Page 87, Grade 10). The texts do not mention much about treatment. There is no vaccine against dengue fever. So the recommendation is to avoid exposure during high-incidence season.

Among these endemic diseases, dengue fever is the most common in Myanmar during the rainy season, especially in areas infested with the infected mosquitoes. According to the WHO, 2.5 billion people are at risk from the four major types of dengue virus, which is transmitted to people from infected mosquitoes. Each year there are tens of millions of cases. Since there is no vaccine against dengue fever, the prevention given is to avoid being bitten.

There is essentialism in *English Text*. Myanmar people use “Kyat” as monetary instead of “dollar”, however they do use “Fahrenheit” to describe temperature. They also regard buying traditional costume as national patriotism. Longyi is a long piece of brightly colored cloth used as clothing in Myanmar.

“When Hla Hla had saved enough money, she bought a beautiful longyi.”(Page 16, Grade 9)

“Would you like to come with me to have Mohinga?”(Page 76, Grade 9)

“Tourists like to visit Bagan and they like to visit Inlay Lake, too.”(Page 6, Grade 9)

“If you like grapes, I will bring you some when I come back from Myingyan.” (Page 55, Grade 10)

### 5.2.5. Myanmar’s Normalized Poverty

As there is severe currency inflation in Myanmar, more people believe that Myanmar’s economy situation would be worse. In *English Text* Grade 10, unit 7 Dreams do come true which is adopted from *Dreams do come true* by Jim Bishop, it tells a story that Jim’s mother wants to have a diamond earring. Later because of the poverty, they have to pawn them. Even policemen are poorly paid in those days (see Figure 10). By depicting this kind of poverty, it functions as normalizing poverty. What’s more, the passage aims at encouraging Myanmar people to have dreams, because as the end of passage and title indicate, dreams do come true, which let Myanmar people have faith in getting through the current difficulty.

Myanmar’s medical care is poorly developed. Besides these endemic diseases, Myanmar also suffers from natural disaster like earthquakes. So, earthquake is one of the central topics in the textbooks. In the passage of Unit 9, Grade 9 earthquakes’ causes are explained and several examples are given. In the last paragraph, it states “*If seismologists could predict earthquakes, we could save about 20,000 human lives each year. Humans can control many things about nature, but we cannot control earthquakes*”.

30 Times became what my father called “hard”. The earrings were gone a long time before I noticed. When I asked about them, she smiled and cried at the same time. “Your father had to pawn them,” she said. “He’ll get them back.”

35 Policemen were poorly paid in those days and then the city cut their salaries further. My mother made our clothes on a sewing machine. At night, she sewed rosettes on silk garters for a penny a piece. Every year she paid the interest on the pawn ticket.

Then, one summer, she surrendered. The payment was due but she ignored it. “Earrings,” she said, “are a form of vanity we can’t afford.”

Figure 10. Grade 10, page 52

10 Today, traditional medicine and treatments are not only used in developing countries, but are increasing in popularity in North America and Europe. In the United Kingdom, for example, US\$ 230 million is spent on traditional remedies annually. In China, traditional herbal medicines account for thirty to fifty percent of all medicines used. The global market for traditional medicines is nearly \$ 60 billion, and growing every year.

15 Twenty-five percent of modern medicines are made from plants that were first used in traditional medicine, and scientists believe this is just the beginning. For example, one Chinese herbal remedy, which has been used for two thousand years, has recently been found to be effective against varieties of malaria that have resistance to other drugs. 20 This herb could end up saving a million lives a year, mostly among children. In South Africa, another traditional plant is being used to treat patients with AIDS.

Recognizing the importance of traditional medicines, in 2003 WHO introduced a Traditional Medicine Strategy. According to this strategy, there were several areas of

Figure 11. page 85, Grade 9

### 5.2.6. AIDS in Myanmar Education

Another serious problem in Myanmar is the medical care, which is also presented in the textbooks. In *English Text Grade 9 Unit 10 traditional medicine*, it encourages Myanmar people to take traditional medicine. Due to economic backwardness and poor medical conditions, hepatitis and intestinal diseases are prevalent in Myanmar. Hospitals are divided into public and private hospitals. Public hospitals are cheaper, but medicines are scarce; private hospitals are better off, with higher costs for consultation and medicines; Myanmar has a low-level system of publicly-funded medical care, in which access to public hospitals is free of charge. There is no medical insurance system in Myanmar. Because of the shortage of doctors and medicine in public hospitals, rich people go to private hospitals.

In the passage, it points out that in 1974, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) introduced a new policy, which encourages developing countries to develop their own traditional forms of medicine, instead of turning to Western medicine for expensive cures. Today, WHO says that a third of the global population are not able to use modern drugs. In poorest parts of Africa and Asia, that figure can rise to fifty percent. WHO believes that the people in developing countries who could not afford or find modern medical doctors are better off using traditional medicine rather than no medicine at all.

These textbooks try to use WHO's policy to persuade people to use traditional medicine. What's more, it states that the traditional medicines are getting its popularity in North America and Europe. It also says that there is a traditional plant which can be used to treat patients with AIDS. After communist party of Myanmar, drug abuse has become a serious issue. HIV and AIDS spread to Myanmar in 1990s. In Page 85, Grade 9, Unit 10 is about traditional medicine, in which it states "In south Africa, another traditional plant is being used to treat patients with AIDS.". Drugs issue has close connection with AIDS. Drug addicts are high risk group with HIV and MARPs. If there is any treatment with AIDS, it would benefit the country a lot.

Because of the saying that Chinese herbal remedy can treat malaria and AIDS, there is an increase in the number

of Myanmar students coming to China to learn traditional medicine (see [Figure 11](#)).

### 5.2.7. Other Aspects of Western Culture

What's more, in *English Text*, there is a statement saying that "All the novels written by Charles Dickens are good." (see [Figure 12](#)), which may cause students in Myanmar to believe all Anglophone literature is contemporary and good.

### 5.2.8. Representations of Featured Foreign Countries

Table 5. Features of foreign countries

Country	Features
USA(NY)	with advanced taste in art; music and literature; rich; warm-hearted citizens; many Museums
UK	with huge investment in traditional remedies; Shakespeare's play
Italy	with well-developed medical industry, many philosophers
China	one of the most densely-populated countries in the world; with frequent earthquakes; Chinese herbal remedy
Columbia	with frequent earthquakes; volcano eruption
Japan	with many Tsunamis and earthquakes
South Africa	AIDS
Egypt	Egyptian calendar
Pakistan	with many philosophers and professors

From [Table 5](#), we can see that West-European and Anglophone countries are exclusively constructed with positive image, erasing the previous colonial hostility. Such erasure of colonial elements in Myanmar is achieved by legitimizing English as tourism-driven resource for Myanmar's economic development and regional internationalization with Southeast Asia. English is construed as the most powerful language, and good English Proficiency leads to better life, education and wealth [26]. Learning English also serves the tourism industry well.

*English Texts* convey one idea that the poverty-stricken discourse of Myanmar is prevalent as a result of the national disaster and disease attack rather than the historical consequences of colonization and ethnic conflicts. Such disaster discourse is widely depicted and justified when it comes to the neighbouring countries such as China and Japan.

**Exercise : Finish each sentence in such a way that it means the same as the one that is given.**

- Every woman wants to be beautiful.  
There is no \_\_\_\_\_.
- All the students in this class obey the rules.  
There is no \_\_\_\_\_.
- Every house in our street has a television set.  
There is no \_\_\_\_\_.
- All the novels written by Charles Dickens are good.  
There is no \_\_\_\_\_.
- All the staff in our department are well-disciplined.  
There is no \_\_\_\_\_.

### 5.2.9. Representation of Other ASEAN

To increase avenue and promote cultural and mutual communication, there is no need of a visa certificate if people from ASEAN wants to travel in southeast Asia. Similarly, in *English Text* Grade 10, there are two units about travelling in southeast Asia. Myanmar is not the most developed in both economy and technology among ASEAN, so it needs to cooperate with other southeast Asian countries to develop, and enhance its right of speech.

Locations, capital cities, populations, tourist attractions, ethnicity and festivity are included in two units in Myanmar *English Text* (see Table 6). Myanmar spares no efforts to encourage its people to travel in southeast Asia, which would not only benefit other member countries, but also bring profits to itself. It is conducive to its own development, on the other hand, it would increase the economy of other ASEAN members.

Table 6. Features of other ASEAN countries

Country	Representation
Brunei Darussalam	Brunei Arts Handicraft Training Centre; Kampong Ayer; Temburong zoo; Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque
Cambodia	with Silver pagoda; Angkor Wat; Hinduism; frescos about Khmer
Indonesia	A land of surprise; with rich culture and art; active volcano; islands and mountains; earthquakes
Laos	within many ethnic groups; pagodas and historical sites; Buddha images and artifacts; Wat Sisaket Temple
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur; excellent shopping facilities; pleasant beach resorts
The Philippines	A wealth of entertainment within classical plays and cultural shows and bands; Bayanilan dancers; Catholic churches
Singapore	Finest attractions; Merlion
Thailand	Shopper's paradise; opportunities for sports; Pattaya and Phuket
Myanmar	the Golden Land; long, white, sandy beaches; Bagan
Vietnam	an agricultural society; with primitive forests; beaches; old citadel; Hanoi; the Mausoleum of President Ho Chi Min

## 6. Discussion

Based on these implicit and explicit results, the study finds that there is clear focus on providing varied representations of cultural and other identities. Oversimplification is very apparent, especially in the presentations of the speakers of the target language. In addition to oversimplification, a gender imbalance in these representations is obvious. All the target cultural symbols and practices in the two textbooks attached great importance on British culture.

Is *English Text* representing a real Myanmar culture? Does *English Text* see culture as homogeneous or heterogeneous? Does *English Text* see the world as White/Anglophone-centered or embracing others? From the analysis we know that the answers are all negative. It is indispensable for textbook designers to balance the identity options and cultural elements in source and target cultures.

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1. Summary

The aim of this study is to examine the imagined communities represented in *English Text* used in Myanmar in terms of the identity options and representations of source and target cultures. The study is based on the *English Text* series of two books used for teaching English for high level (Grade9-10) students. The data is analyzed by using the CDA framework.

The findings of the study show that there is almost equal representation of Myanmar characters in two textbooks. And the representation of both Myanmar males and females is relatively reasonable compared with that of foreign characters. About occupations, the findings show more job opportunities are given to Myanmar males rather than Myanmar females. However, the representations of characters should be considered equally, which is not the same as that of foreign characters. With regard to the latter, oversimplification and misrepresentation of speakers of the target language are common. British people are chosen as a representation of ideal English speakers. What's more, all the quotations of literature works are Anglophone-centered, which is also a kind of oversimplification and misrepresentations of the target culture.

### 7.2. Implications

Because foreign languages cannot be effectively learned without learning about its culture(s) and cultural identities of its speakers. Separating cultural learning from language does not help language learners to master the language. Therefore, the accurate representations of culture is very important.

First, the oversimplification and misrepresentation of foreign characters and cultures in *English text* have an negative impact on Myanmar students' English learning. Myanmar Ministry of Education should pay more attention to the allocation of target communities.

Second, British culture as the target culture and British people as the ideal speakers is very misleading. More countries' culture and the varieties of speakers should be enriched. If only the British is represented in textbooks, students may think British is more superior than other English speakers.

Third, the gender imbalance in both source and target countries indicates that females are marginalized. This imbalance convey a wrong images to Myanmar students about foreign women. Textbooks designers should reflect the true situation and balance the roles between men and women.

### 7.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings, the following recommendations for future research can be identified. First, this study examined only two textbooks representing one series for teaching English. So further research is needed to examine other language textbooks used for teaching English at different stages. Second, the study examined only the

identity options and cultural representations. Further research can extend the research varieties to obtain more accurate results. What's more, future study can examine learners' perceptions of English language in their careers.

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