

## 94. Deconstructing ELT ideology and normalized discourses through critical discourse analysis: Collaborative autoethnography

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### Abstract

English language teaching departments have been regarded as neutral and prestigious for more than a century. However, the colonial, neocolonial, postcolonial and neoliberal practices of these departments are forgotten. In this study, we aim to deconstruct this ideology and develop a critical perspective within the framework of critical pedagogy and critical discourse analysis. Both of these two approaches aim to analyze power, power relations, forms of knowledge and subjective experiences. This study is based on collaborative autoethnography that prioritizes researchers' beliefs, experiences, observations and stories. We asked 10 guiding questions that showed how we came to reject our current identity in ELT discipline that produced various forms of knowledge that constitute certain discursive practices. We aimed to show that ELT departments in Turkey are a continuation of this colonial and neoliberal mind, and therefore a new space should be created for other languages to take their place on social circles. We strongly recommend that ELT departments can incorporate lessons that reinforce criticality, critical pedagogy and critical discourse analysis so that the real historical conditions could be shown to the students and teacher candidates in these departments. Therefore, new discourses can be constituted and produced to allow novel subjective experiences and practices.

**Keywords:** Critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, autoethnography, power, discourse

## ELT ideolojisini ve normalleřtirilmiř sylemleri eleřtirel sylem analizi yoluyla yapıbozuma uęratmak: İřbirlikçi otoetnografi

### z

İngilizce ğretmenlięi blmleri, bir asırdan fazla bir suredir tarafsız ve prestijli olarak kabul edilmiřtir. Ancak bu departmanların kolonyal, neokolonyal, postkolonyal ve neoliberal uygulamaları unutulmuřtur. Bu alıřmada, eleřtirel pedagoji ve eleřtirel sylem analizi erevesinde bu ideolojiyi yapıbozuma uęratmayı ve eleřtirel bir bakıř aısı geliřtirmeyi amalıyoruz. Bu iki yaklařımın her ikisi de gc, g iliřkilerini, bilgi biimlerini ve znel deneyimleri analiz etmeyi amalar. Bu alıřma, arařtırmacıların inanlarına, deneyimlerine, gzlemlerine ve hikayelerine ncelik veren iřbirlikçi otoetnografiye dayanmaktadır. Belirli sylemsel uygulamaları oluřturan eřitli bilgi biimleri reten İngiliz Dili Eęitimi blmlerindeki mevcut kimlięimizi nasıl reddettięimizi gsteren 10 yol gsterici soru sorduk. Trkiye'deki İngiliz Dili Eęitimi blmlerinin bu smrgeci ve neoliberal aklın bir

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devamı olduğunu ve bu nedenle diğer dillerin sosyal çevrelerde yer alması için yeni bir alan yaratılması gerektiğini göstermeyi amaçladık. İngiliz bölümlerindeki öğrencilere ve öğretmen adaylarına gerçek tarihsel koşulların gösterilebilmesi için eleştirelliği, eleştirel pedagojiyi ve eleştirel söylem analizini pekiştiren dersler içermesini şiddetle tavsiye ediyoruz. Bu nedenle, yeni özel deneyimlere ve pratiklere izin vermek için yeni söylemler oluşturulabilir ve üretilebilir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Eleştirel pedagoji, eleştirel söylem analizi, otoetnografi, iktidar, söylem

## Introduction

English language teaching departments across the globe can be regarded as ideological, postcolonial, neocolonial and neoliberal considering Anglo-American strategies, tactics and discourses (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 2008). Discursive practices constituted by Anglo-American and their Dominion extensions have produced subjective experiences that are dictated to behave in certain manners. English language teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics (AL) departments are normalized and seen as neutral and prestigious in many countries (Pennycook, 2017). Considering the colonial and imperial practices of Anglo-American cultures, adopting white race-based practices, it can be said that they establish identities complying with their discourses and are perceived as superior by the Orient. Thus, colonialism and Orientalism have gone hand in hand to subjugate individuals and communities through oppressive and repressive mechanisms (Said, 1979). Although colonialism has, in principle, ended in 1930s, Orientalism has spread and expanded in different directions. The British Council and American Imperialist organizations through the World Bank and IMF as well as Orientalist academic institutions have established postcolonial, neocolonial and neoliberal aims to spread the English language (Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson, 2017; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) However, the British Council has played a more dominant role in achieving this goal by developing projects to supervise ELT departments in other countries such India and Turkey. Disconnected from the historical conditions, ELT departments have come to be seen as neutral and a place of prestige. In addition, some other academic institutions such as TESOL, TEFL and journals of applied linguistics have dominated the sphere of ELT ideology. Thus, academia has produced forms of knowledge to convince ELT professionals that these departments have been necessary and unideological. Power through knowledge has been adopted by ELT professionals who today perceive these discursive practices as normal. Therefore, what should be done is to unmask and deconstruct this established ideology and to recommend new subjective experiences that can behave with a different identity. In a way, ELT has been the place of identity politics in academia similar to Orientalism.

This study has emerged out of the necessity to displace this ideology and instead provide new forms of knowledge and subjective experiences. We clearly refuse this ideology in our context, Turkey and the world. We believe that incorporating lessons such as Critical Discourse Analysis, Orientalism, Postcolonial Studies, Ideology and ELT can enable ELT professionals to understand the historical conditions and the practices of Anglo-American ideology. Thus, we hold the idea that our practices and recommendations are emancipatory and supportive of social justice and equality.

## ELT Ideology

ELT has been regarded as an industry by scholars in recent decades. In this sense, ELT industry can be likened to culture industry in critical theory and Fordism as a capitalist practice because it sells Anglo-

American images to ELT professionals and other related subjects. Pennycook (2017) emphasizes the nature of ELT industry by seeing it as a global practice:

Something called English is mobilized by English language industries, including ELT, with particular language effects. But something called English is also part of complex language chains, mobilized as part of multiple acts of identity and desire. It is not English – if by that we mean a certain grammar and lexicon – that is at stake here. It is the discourses around English that matter, the ways in which an idea of English is caught up in all that we do so badly in the name of education, all the exacerbations of inequality that go under the label of globalization, all the linguistic calumnies that denigrate other ways of speaking, all the shamefully racist institutional interactions that occur in schools, hospitals, law courts, police stations, social security offices and unemployment centers.(pp. XIV-XV).

This perspective has also been adopted in the sphere of linguistic human rights because the ideology of English has been as a practice of linguisticism (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2010) because it is also related to human vulnerability in terms of human rights (Turner, 2006). This ideology is presented and represented as a place of democracy and liberation for the Orient. Turkey, in our study, has also been one of the centers of this industry and ideology. The British Council has penetrated and permeated Turkey in different forms by collaborating with Higher Education and the Ministry of Education. Those in power in Turkey have approached the British Council and other Anglo-American practices with admiration because they have held the strong belief that the English language might open a new space for Turkish modernization and can even be the strongest tool or weapon to modernize and Westernize. Some academics in Turkey assume that if English is not taught at Turkish schools from elementary to higher education, lagging behind the superior cultures would be inescapable. Thus, the ideology of the dominant English language in Turkey resembles the adoption of capitalism and neoliberalism that have been imposed on Turkey since 1950s. What is interesting is that the advent of capitalism and neoliberalism into Turkey coincides with the establishment of ELT industry. These two ideologies complement each other in many ways. What is more tragic for Turkey is that those who cannot achieve the expected proficiency in receptive and productive skills in schools are supposed to use English as a medium of instruction.

While a group of Turkish academics or students are expected to speak their mother tongue, they prefer to use English when they speak to each other. This subjective experience is constituted through discourses that shape their minds. We interpret these subjective experiences as a tragedy in that all other possibilities are ignored in the context of Turkey. Turkish people, as in the USA or the UK as well as some other countries, practice capitalism every day without questioning what capitalism does to them and what kind of social injustice and inequality is created through the capitalist ideology. Turkey has its own historical conditions while adopting this linguistic ideology dating back to late 1930s. We as two researchers believe that this ideology should be replaced by an ethical approach that includes other world languages through which the subalterns can express themselves, which can be seen as a human right. The spread of the English language and ELT industry is a sheer violation of human rights. This ideology imposes certain discourses, practices and experiences on the people living in Turkey because there are hundreds of people waiting to be a part of this ELT industry, which can also be considered a place for another industry such as Hollywood, because in today`s world, individuals endorse capitalism by desiring Hollywood and similarly the English language. English is desired in such a way that it dictates itself in Turkish people by imposing the practice `Do not use your mother tongues! ` This ideology is widely supported by those in power in Turkey, and propounding heteroglossia developed by Bakhtin (1981), in the sense of plurality and multiplicity of perspectives, meanings, speeches and languages in a single text, as a human right within and outside Turkey seems to be a harder responsibility

for them. The critical scholars as intellectuals have already dissected this ideology from different perspectives and have contributed to the field (Newman, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2010). We as responsible citizens and researchers also aim to follow this line of thinking in order to support diversity and heteroglossia. We clearly reject the ideology of ELT industry.

### **Critical discourse analysis**

The age of meta-narratives has almost ended due to the emergence of poststructuralism and postmodernism, both of which have enabled scholars to criticize modernity and structuralism that often perceived the world through pure reason and binary relations (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Critical discourse analysis emanating from the principles of poststructuralism is related to power, discourse and knowledge (Falzon, 1998; Foucault, 1981). In this study, we aim to deconstruct discourses regarding ELT ideology and oppose normativity of ELT industry which shows itself as a sign of power. Knowledge of ELT practices and applied linguistics is constituted, produced, reproduced and duplicated constantly. There are students learning English, teachers teaching English, graduate students preparing master's theses and doctoral dissertations, academics producing articles and books, all of whom disseminate the knowledge of ELT to others and all of whom are embedded in this practice as individuals engaging in capitalism every morning. In this sense, a dichotomy is created between the English language and other languages. In the context of Turkey, those (individuals, groups, institutions, organizations) that possess the knowledge of English are seen as more powerful, prestigious and superior. The British Council has been using all sources including the mainstream media and social media to spread its good news to the people (including the presidents of Turkish universities) in Turkey and even share their resources such as textbooks with Turkish individuals. Turkish commentators in the newspapers have been convinced to write about the importance and prestige of the English language. Considering the rising number of ELT departments and other English-related departments or centers, it becomes understandable as to how discourses are constituted and how subjective experiences are regulated. We aim to unmask these discourses in Turkey and contribute to the field by raising awareness of this ideology.

### **Method**

In this study, we adopted collaborative autoethnography as a practice of self-reflection. Autoethnography can be seen as a part of ethnography in that it aims to criticize what is given to individuals at a particular place at a particular time (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015). Beliefs, institutional practices, subjective experiences, values, policies, social relationships, discourses, discursive practices and identities are described, evaluated, criticized and interrogated. Thus, autoethnography aims to provide insights concerning individuals' cultures and society. Subjectivity and subjective experiences reinforced through narratives, stories and diaries are prioritized as an insider perspective (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Thus, insiders' observations and interactions with others in their immediate settings become valuable data for analysis (Ellis, 2004). By doing so, alienating impacts are lessened through autoethnography. Idiographic nature of research is reinforced in autoethnographic studies that prioritize subjective truths rather than objective truths or validity. Researchers in autoethnography are mainly divided into analytic and evocative autoethnographers. The former refers to the development of theories or bringing explanations to these theories, while the latter aims to evoke feelings through narratives. In this study, we combine both types because our aim is not only to convey our narratives but also try to develop theoretical views regarding what we experience as researchers. Collaborative autoethnography, in this present study, aims to provide a stronger claim to deconstruct ELT ideology and reflect upon the experiences that the two researchers have had.

## Procedure and researchers

We as two researchers in this study have a strong background in ELT and specialize in critical pedagogy. We teach various topics in ELT at tertiary level in Turkey. We both aim to develop new discourses and perspectives that prioritize diversity and heteroglossia in our immediate settings. We radically oppose ELT departments and aim to displace and replace them with various centers that foreground languages other than the English language because the spread of English has been bothering for more than a decade. Reading the scholars such as Alastair Pennycook, Robert Phillipson, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Scott Thurnsbury, Michel Foucault, Ferda Keskin, Karl Marx, Meltem Ahiska, Saul Newman and Edward Said has changed our ideas regarding ELT departments and applied linguistics radically. Therefore, this radical perspective entails radical democracy that prioritizes new experiences and discourses and opens up new space for other voices. We strongly believe that the existence of ELT departments suppresses the voices of others and makes use of the prestige of the English language. Thus, this superiority creates a deep chasm between ELT and other linguistic departments. Therefore, we see ELT hegemony as a violation of human rights and an exercise of power over others. Our aim is not to go against the English language per se or attack on individuals who practice this ideology. Our main goal is to question these subjective experiences in Turkey and interrogate why we behave in this manner but not another fashion. We asked the following questions while starting the journey of critical pedagogy.

1. Why did we choose to study in ELT?
2. What discourses guided us into such a practice?
3. What are the effects of the spread of ELT departments in Turkey?
4. How can we take action to deconstruct this ideology?
5. What observations have been made regarding ELT industry in Turkey?
6. What can we do in the future to create changes in our society?
7. What discourses are constituted regarding ELT in Turkey?
8. What practices are exercised to reinforce ELT ideology in Turkey?
9. Is ELT really a scientific discipline or only a disciplinary/regulatory mechanism?
10. What power relations and forms of knowledge are produced through ELT industry and ideology?

Although we asked more than these questions, we mainly focused on certain ones that guided this study. The nature of these questions was based on criticality and reflexivity. Critical pedagogy was adopted as a theoretical perspective in order to oppose the repressive and oppressive mechanisms of ELT ideology in Turkey. In addition, critical discourse analysis was used to understand the relationship between power, knowledge and discourses. Thus, critical pedagogy and critical discourses analysis complemented each other in that both aim to produce power relations and gainsay the practices of neoliberal ideology, which is also related to ELT ideology in its meronymic sense (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988, 1996; Giroux & McLaren, 1986; McLaren, 2015). We also believe that raising questions is more important than finding answers to questions. In addition, we are aware that the tension between power and subjects is incessant and could even be productive as well as oppressive. Thus, problematizing has

emerged as a pivotal methodological tool in order to understand who we are not rather than who we are. We have attempted to question our identity and abandon our comfort zones to imagine a more just, equal and liberal society. We are also aware that our professional identities and subjective experiences have been the result of historical conditions and discursive practices, and that we still do not know whether there are things outside of discourses or discursive practices that we are also skeptical of. We do not know yet whether there are other ways to conceptualize the society and our identities. We believe that we are trapped in the problem of ELT ideology. We reject this identity and instead aim to form new identities that support heteroglossia and diversity. We reject ELT ideology since it is still colonial in various forms. Ridding the educational system of the effects of Orientalism, neocolonialism and neoliberalism, Turkey, we believe, can find other ways to respect and incorporate languages other than English and cultures other than Anglo-American. We still do not know the answer to this question. We are also aware that we are still repeating ourselves and our discourses. Therefore, new terminology is needed to find more radical ways so that individuals can get rid of the trouble of culture industry, consumer society habits and specifically industries such as ELT industry.

### **Outcomes**

This autoethnographic study aimed to deconstruct the discourses regarding ELT ideology because it allows no space for others to step into. In order to take action, we included some lessons in our department so that our audience, undergraduates, can be aware of this ideology and find new spaces of hope. Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, Cultural Studies, Postcolonialism, Orientalism, World Languages and Linguistic Human Rights were among the lessons that we started to teach in our departments.

We found an answer to the first question. We believe that ELT departments were one of the most prestigious and popular departments in the faculty of education, which caused us to choose this major. The answer to the second question was that we were exposed to the discourse that English was important from family to school settings through business life. The answer to third question shows that the effect of the spread of the English language has left no room for other languages to breathe. We write articles to deconstruct ideology and start classes that lead our audience to critically reflect upon the effect of ELT departments on Turkish individuals. We have also observed that each school in Turkey purchases books from Anglo-American publishers. We think that in the future we can establish new centers by developing a project with one of European Union countries to represent other languages and cultures. The media, academia, political authorities and the Council of Higher Education together with the Ministry of Education produce discourses that favor English. More ELT or English-related departments are opened and funded so as to reinforce ELT ideology. We hardly believe that ELT is a scientific discipline and that ELT or applied linguistics is ideological apparatus that produces pseudo-science and regulates bodies. We hold the belief that ELT ideology produces Orientalist discourses and hardly allow other voices to be heard. In addition, this ideology functions through neoliberalism and is a continuation of colonialism (Harvey, 2007). Thus, ELT ideology exercises itself as a form of power and knowledge. This knowledge is biased, regulatory, manipulative and ideological.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, we intended to show our observations, beliefs and ideas by believing that ELT is a discipline that holds power and ideology in order to render other cultures inferior as an Orientalist practice. We have been in the sacred realm of ELT which is now being demolished for us. We reject this identity and

ELT discipline since its existence is based on colonialism and neoliberal practices. We asked almost a dozen questions to deconstruct ELT ideology which is still exercising its power across the globe. We hold the assumption that ELT ideology hinders languages other than English from breathing. We see this linguistic approach as a violation of human rights (Ignatieff, 2001; Kucuradi, 2013) and thus refuse to support its tenets and principles. Our observations, experiences and systematic analyses of textbooks show that ELT industry is supported by scientific groups, academia, neocolonial organizations such as the British Council, political power including Thatcher- Reagan and neoliberal agencies. Critical pedagogy and critical discourses analysis provided us with new perspectives in that we could oppose the oppressive and repressive ideology of ELT departments that dictate certain discourses and subjective experiences. The paradox still lives with us because we have to act against English in English in today's world. However, it is essential to find new ways and novel modes of thinking to establish new experiences. We believe that we can achieve this goal through the culture of negotiation, social dialogue, reinforcement of heteroglossia, emphasis on diversity, radicalization of education and doing cultural politics. We are aware that we are coping with at least a 500-year-old colonial, racist, capitalist and imperial ideology and power. As Fyodor Dostoyevski said when he was in prison;

‘Of course I cannot break through the wall by battering my head against it if I really have not the strength to knock it down, but I am not going to be reconciled to it simply because it is a stone wall and I have not the strength...’

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