IN THE NAME OF ALLAH
THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL

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**Narrative Impact and EFL Children's
Self-concept/Identity:
A Cultural Study**

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of MA in
Teaching English as a Foreign Language
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چکیده

الف. موضوع و طرح مسئله (اهمیت موضوع و هدف): در این رساله اثر روایتهای یکی از کتب زبان انگلیسی رایج در ایران (سری چتربکس) بر خودپنداره/هویت کودکان زبان آموز بررسی شده است که معمولا عاری از هرگونه ایدئولوژی در نظر گرفته می شوند.

ب. مبانی نظری شامل مرور مختصری از منابع، چارچوب نظری، پرسشها و فرضیه ها: در دیدگاه پساساختارگرایی زبان، سازنده هویت افراد محسوب می شود و روایت، واسطه فهم ما از جهان. در حالیکه فرایند سالم تشکیل هویت نیاز به ارتباط تعاملی با دیگران دارد، در حیطه آموزش زبان انگلیسی این رابطه کاملا تقابلی و یک طرفه است. در چنین فضایی هویت کودکان تحت تاثیر ایدئولوژی تقابلی دیگری قرار می گیرد. روایتها به عنوان مهمترین محصول هر فرهنگ قادرند ایدئولوژیهای همراه خود را به شکلی کاملا طبیعی و عادی جلوه دهند که برای خوانندگان قانع کننده باشد. در دوره نوجوانی که زمان شکل گیری هویت افراد است روایتها می توانند بیشترین تاثیر را روی مخاطب خود داشته باشند. در این رساله دو پرسش اصلی و شش زیرگروه مدنظر بوده است. ابتدا اثر روایتهای چتربکس بر خودپنداره کلی کودکانی که حداقل دو سال این سری را خوانده بودند وسپس تاثیر انها بر شش زیرگروه خودپنداره بررسی شد. در بخش دوم مکانیسم قرارگرفتن ایدئولوژی تقابلی دیگری در روایتها مورد تحقیق قرار گرفت.
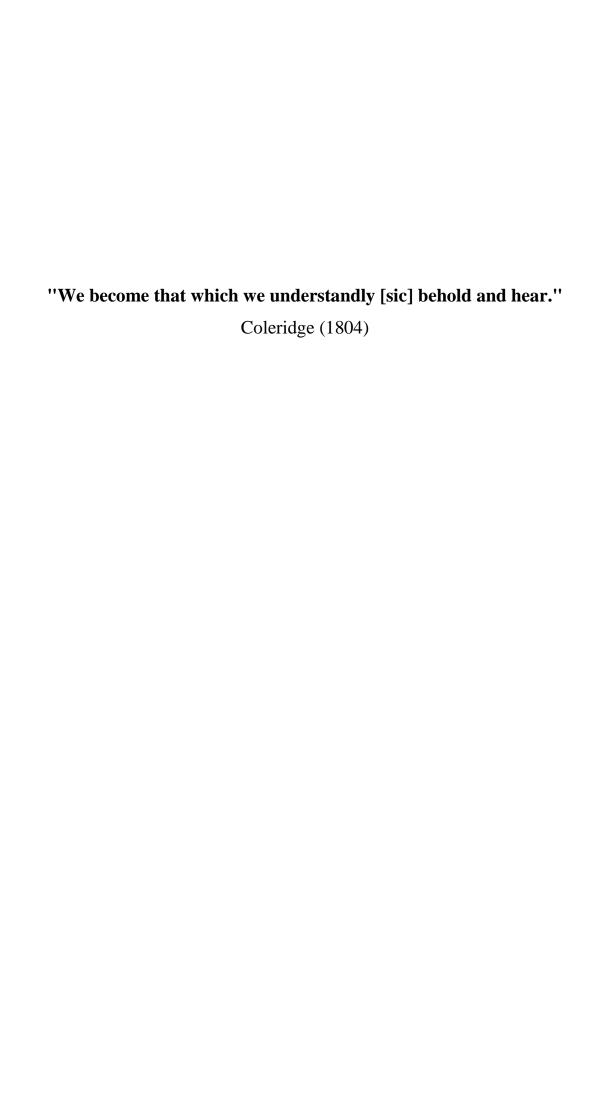
پ. روش تحقیق شامل تعریف مفاهیم، روش تحقیق، جامعه مورد تحقیق، نمونه گیری و روشهای نمونه گیری، ابزار اندازه گیری، نحوه اجرای آن، شیوه گردآوری و تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها: 137کودک ایرانی زبان آموز از هر دو جنس در این تحقیق شرکت کردند که حدودا نیمی از آنها هنوز دوره چتربکس را شروع نکرده بودند. هردو گروه به پرسشنامه سنجش خودپنداره کودکان پاسخ دادند. از میان آنها 36 نفر حذف شدند. از طریق آزمون مستقل تی میانگین دو گروه مورد مقایسه قرار گرفت. در بخش کیفی بر اساس مدل گریماس تقابلهای دوتایی بین شخصیتهای همه داستانهای چتربکس در هر شش سطح تعیین شدند.

ت. یافته های تحقیق: خودپنداره کودکان گروه اول که به مدت دوسال در معرض روایتهای چتر باکس بودند نسبت به گروه دوم در حوزه ظاهر فیزیکی به طور معناداری تقلیل یافته بود. به عبارت دیگر زبان آموزان گروه دوم تصویر ی به مراتب بهتر از شکل ظاهری خود در ذهن داشتند. از طرفی ایدئولوژی تقابلی دیگری بیش از هرچیز در تفاوت ظاهری شخصیتهای داستانها ظهور کرده بود که موید نتایج بخش کمی این تحقیق محسوب می شد.

ث. نتیجه گیری و پیشنهادات: همزادپنداری با رابطه تقابلی "ما سفیدپوستان-شما خارجیها" در کودکان می تواند احساس حقارت در حیطه شکل ظاهری ایجاد کند، همان اتفاقی که بین استعمارگر و استعمار شده در گذشته روی می داد. از آنجا که در سایر محصولات هر فرهنگ چنین ایدئولوژیهایی در قالب روایت می تواند وجود داشته باشد، محقق پیشنهاد می کند که در کنار توجه دادن متولیان امر تهیه و تدوین کتب زبان کودکان و افزایش آگاهی معلمین به عاری نبودن داستانهای کودکان از ایدئولوژیهای فرهنگی، مهارتهای خواندن خلاقانه و انتقادی روایتها در کودکان زبان آموز تقویت شود.

صحت اطلاعات مندرج در این فرم بر اساس محتوای پایان نامه و ضوابط مندرج در فرم را گواهی می نماییم.

رئیس کتابخانه: نام استاد راهنما: سمت علمی: نام دانشکده:

"We become that which we understandly [sic] behold and hear."

Coleridge (1804)

To the 137 kids of this study

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ABSTRACT

The present study assessed the impact of narrative content of *American Chatterbox* series on the self-concept/self-identity of child learners. The impact of language ideologies on students could not be simply ignored as Leonardo (2003) truly considered subjectivity as an effect of ideology. Unlike the existing Us-Them relations in the field of TEFL, a healthy process of identity construction requires dialogic relations between people in the social context. The sample consisted of 50 language learners studying *American Chatterbox* series for at least two years and 51 newcomers to three language institutes. The researcher drew on Karami's (2000) translated and adapted version of Ahluwalia's (1986) Children's Self-concept Scale (CSCS) to collect the quantitative data and analyzed it by the independent sample *t*-test procedure. Under the rubrics of Greimas' actant model, the binary oppositions between characters were established. The effect of Othering ideology was no more evident than in physical appearance of characters. The portrayal of opponent characters' physical appearance as Othered bodies echoed what Kamada (2010) called *the discourse of Other grotesqueness.* In line with findings of qualitative analysis of ideologically Otherized narrative content of the mentioned series, language learners had a significantly lower sense of self-concept on the domain of physical appearance and attributes (PHY) than newcomers: $t(86.46) = -2.12$, $sig._{(2\text{-}tailed)} = .04$, $\alpha = .05$. In a postcolonial sense, identifying with "Self-Other" relations between fictional characters may lead in a sense of owning Othered bodies on the part of child learners. These findings supported Hunt's (2005) assumption on readers' identities: "Readers are ideologically constructed by their identification with the character" (p. 42). What appeared to be emerging from this study, however, was a call for awareness of the interrelations among

the issues once approached separately, that is the liaison among narrative genre, ideology of Othering, and identity construction in EFL classrooms.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BEH = behavioral adjustment

CSCS = Children Self-Concept Scale

EFL = English as a foreign language

FRE = freedom from anxiety

HAP = happiness and satisfaction

HOV = homogeneity of variance

INT = intellectual and school status

M = mean

p = probability level

PHY = physical appearance and attributes

POP = popularity

SD = standard deviation

SEM = standard error of the mean

TESOL = teaching English as a second language

TOT = total self-concept

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Foreword

Always I wonder why narratives continue to fascinate readers during the history of readership. After taking a course titled, Literature in Education in Shahid Beheshti University as a part of MA program, my lifelong questions had the chance of being answered. Then, in open classes of the Iranian Academy of Persian Language I've got more familiar with the realm of "narratology", especially through taking a course named, Narrative Theory. That was the departure point of the present study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Whereas TESOL textbooks continue to use the English language as a cultural carrier of dominant ideologies, language materials for children are considered too "innocent" to teach cultural discriminations. Most of these textbooks use narratives as pedagogic tools for making language learning process more enjoyable and interesting. One can see this humanistic claim visually printed on the back cover of the textbooks for children, even in their accompanied teacher's books. However, the exposure of learners with cultural issues and the process of identity construction have started and almost finished before teachers allow them to learn them through language materials for adult learners.

Nowadays, in the literature of *narrative theory*, a new term for the field of narrotology, narratives are considered the most important product of each culture and naturally pregnant with assumptions, insights, ideologies, and so on (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in Herman & Vervaeck, 2007, p. 218).

Because the primary purpose of language textbooks in Iran is to teach English as a "foreign" language, as an outstanding issue, the dominant ideology of *Othering*—"Us-Them" relations based on racial stereotypes—

should be more taken into account. Several studies have been done in Iran on all the grades of *High School Language Textbooks*, *Pre-university English Textbook*, and *Interchange* series (Arezoumandi, 2005; Ghalijian Moghaddam, 2002; Kakavand, 2009; Sahragard & Davatgarzadeh, 2010) to show the underlying ideologies in these materials. The present study deals with a neglected area, that is, the domain of material development for children. Generally speaking, much of the work done on learner's identity has occurred without consideration of psychological models of identity development, which leaves unexamined some of the questions of how identity develops. On the other hand, identity researches on EFL language learners are rather orphaned, as Yihong, Yuan, Ying, and Yan (2007) proposed:

> There seems to be an unstated assumption that learners' self-identity change is only relevant in English as a second language (ESL) context where target-culture exposures are abundant; self-identity change is unimportant or irrelevant in English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Consequently, research on linguistic outcomes is abundant, and research on non-linguistic outcomes is limited. (p. 134)

To bridge this research gap, the present study concerns with EFL readers' positions against the current text hegemony in the field.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Language is the most common form of social communication. Because of the nature of language as a social practice, language learning engages the identities of learners. Interest in identity categories and language learning is gaining momentum. *TESOL Quarterly* (2006) was devoted to the implications

of race as a form or site of oppression, but this is indicative of the previous neglect of the topic.

Because of the role of language in the formation of identities and its implication in ideologies, as Crookes (2009) noted, language teaching is considered as political as any other domain of education and even more. One particular use of language through which society seeks to exemplify its current values and ideologies is that of narratives.

Our life is replete with stories. From early childhood, we are exposed to other's narratives. As Nojoumian (2009) argued, "Narratives as linguistic structures are the go-between human beings and the world" (p. 49). On the other hand, childhood is seen as the crucial formative period in the life of human beings. Therefore, on the basis of these narratives, the identities of vulnerable children, at least its socio-cultural part (ethnic and gendered), are constructed. To put this in a way closer to the purpose of present study, language learners reading narrative-based textbooks are not only learning a linguistic system, they are learning "a diverse set of socio-cultural practices, often best understood in the context of wider relations of power" (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p. 115).

Othering is an important issue for TESOL professionals to consider because it shapes perceptions about many of the issues that administrators and teachers face. As Palfreyman (2005) pointed out, these issues include classroom interaction, conceptions of what is to be taught and how it should be assessed, and the relative positioning of non-native and native-English-speaking teachers. In other words, with regard to the current text hegemony of ELT industry on ex-colonized countries, this study attempts at examining the impact of the ideology of racial Othering on EFL language learners.