Evaluating ESL Textbooks for Functional and Sociocultural Lessons of Literacy

*Analeigh E. Horton**
University of Arizona

Abstract
ESL researchers (Case et al., 2005; Sidek, 2012) have highlighted a neglect in the field to examine ESL textbooks for lessons about literacy while literacy researchers (Molle, 2015; Hanneman & Scarpino, 2016) postulate that these textbooks contain little to examine. To fill these gaps in the literature, this article recognizes the entanglement of definitions of literacy in language acquisition research and engages an in-depth analysis of three ESL reading *and* writing textbooks, one each at a beginning-, middle-, and high-level, and from publishers/authors across Canada, the UK, and the US. Following a comparison of the lessons of both functional and sociocultural literacy in each textbook, results demonstrate that they target 28 functional literacy skills, indicate relationships between reading and writing that are critical for developing literacy, and reflect ideologies of speed, linear thinking, strength, and personality as important components for developing a literate identity in English. As English remains a dominant world language and globalization continues (Tsui & Tollefson, 2006; Phillipson, 1992), these textbooks sustain the message that English literacy is a key to success.

Introduction

The instruction of second and foreign languages is embodied in an increasing array of formats: in-person classroom teaching, online learning, mobile phone applications, language exchanges, and, one of the more traditional venues, textbooks. Language textbooks offer explanations, practice, and the opportunity for self-guided learning. As globalization continues and English remains a dominant world language, ESL textbooks continue to abound, thus making critical examinations of them all the more relevant (Case et al., 2005; Sidek, 2012; Pennycook, 1998). Tsui and Tollefson (2006) refer to English proficiency as the "global literacy skill" (p. 1), and Phillipson (1992) links this literacy to social, economic, and political success. In light of English's dominance, Williams (2009) writes that "in the rich discussions of how English is deployed and negotiated in the contemporary world, we should not lose sight of the places in which such contact and negotiation take place" (p. 255). For language learners, textbooks serve as important spaces for this contact and negotiation. Language textbooks are often a key (and sometime the sole) resource for learners to study not only the target language but also the values of its speakers (Wen-Cheng et al., 2011). It is therefore crucial to analyze what information textbooks are tendering to their users. Of all the topics to assess in language textbooks, literacy is marked as essential for assessment in language education because learners must develop skills "to cope with

Horton, A. (2020). Evaluating ESL textbooks for functional and sociocultural lessons of literacy. *TESOL Working Paper Series, 18,* 1-17.
Website: Hawaii Pacific University http://www.hpu.edu
*Email: analeighhorton@arizona.edu. Address: The University of Arizona Department of English, Modern Languages, PO Box 210057, Tucson, AZ 85721

the written messages that surround them" (Warner & Dupuy, 2018, p.117). As such, this article analyzes textbooks' messages regarding academic literacy skills and sociocultural ideologies of literacy.

To a student, a textbook may seem straightforward. The specific text is often mandated by a teacher, and the student studies that text without much question. While, to this student, there is only one textbook, the reality is that the teacher had a large marketplace from which to select the text. Teachers, or often, their departments, choose textbooks based on certain qualities, like their alignment with the curriculum, user friendliness, and targeted skills (Wen-Cheng et al., 2011). However, even the most carefully curated textbooks are imbued with meanings formed by authors and publishers that shape the user's conceptualization of the presented material. Thompson (2013) describes the struggles of producing a language textbook:

> Writing foreign language textbooks requires difficult choices about the representation of language users and their cultures, particularly for languages that are spoken in highly complex, constantly changing, even contentious multilingual environments. A discussion about textbooks' depiction of language use and language users, their privileging of standard language forms and omission of other varieties, and how these choices impact the representation of culture is critically important, particularly with respect to languages that serve potentially conflicting political and social purposes in multiethnic and multilingual societies. (p. 947)

Thompson's discussion uncovers the ideological complexity with which textbook authors contend when creating content. As authors make these decisions, they inherently operate under certain ontologies and epistemologies that impact whatever messages they do—or do not—convey that will impact a user's experience and education.

Since textbooks influence students' conceptualizations of the target language, and, consequently, their identity in the target language, textbook selectors must consider multiple variables in their decision. One important, but often overlooked, variable to consider is how a literacy textbook depicts literacy in terms of definitions and practices. A 2016 report published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Lifelong Learning (Hanneman & Scarpino) criticizes multilingual education for neglecting literacy and Crystal (2010) adds that systematic investigations into literacy teaching have only recently begun. Molle (2015) characterizes the separation of language and content learning as a main limitation in literacy development studies. Furthermore, Grady (1997) criticizes the ESL field for being slow to critically evaluate ESL texts. These conversations regarding second language literacy and textbooks converge at the analysis of literacy in language textbooks. Scholars have censured language textbooks for being limited in terms of purview and real-world practicality or barely addressing literacy at all (Gilliland, 2015; Warner & Dupuy, 2018). But what is literacy? To respond to these critiques, we must operationalize a definition of literacy that is useful for ESL contexts.

Defining Literacy

"Literacy" has taken multiple meanings in a variety of contexts. The New London Group (1996) explains that "literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write" (p. 60). Brandt and Clinton (2002) refer to the Great Divide and autonomous model, which align

more closely with this traditional definition and they describe them as "theories that treat literacy as a decontextualized and decontextualizing technology" (p. 337). They instead proffer a more capacious social practice paradigm. Similarly, the New London Group (1996) calls for an extension of "the idea and scope of literacy pedagogy to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies" (p. 61) and move beyond just looking at reading and writing. In a language learning situation, however, reading and writing are essential to explore because learners cannot broaden and deepen their literacy knowledge and experiences if they do not learn how to read and write. Consequently, when discussing literacy pedagogy for language learners, we must implement a multifaceted examination of literacy, from both functional and sociocultural perspectives.

First, functional literacy is defined as "the ability to employ basic reading or writing skills" (Bormuth, 1973, p. 13). Ferris (2015) explains that there are several challenges learners encounter when coping with literacy demands: little extensive reading experience in English makes reading difficult; limited experience in writing in English makes writing difficult; there is a lack of native intuition in the target language; limited vocabulary makes reading and writing challenging; and a lack of cultural and rhetorical knowledge can make connecting with the audience difficult. Ferris (2015) argues that even basic functional literacy skills can be challenging to acquire.

Despite such challenges, basic functional literacy for low-level learners should not be decontextualized. Even basic literacy skills are entrenched in themes of power, citizenship, and democracy (Viera, 2016) and many scholars affirm the relationship between language and culture (Crystal, 2010). As the experiences and values of literacy differ among languages and cultures, following socially-oriented conceptions of literacy (e.g. New London Group, 1996; Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Molle, 2015), it is important that language learners identify the ideologies of literacy in their target language and culture (Warner & Dupuy, 2018; Hull, 1993; Currie & Cray, 2004) when developing literacy skills and literate identities. Lam (2013) explains that the increase of transnationalization makes the research on the spaces in which learners develop literate practices and how they use them to shuttle between communities critical. Currie and Cray (2004) explain this well: "Many encounter and then must learn and use the literacy practices of their new cultures. This often involves acquiring an additional language—a process that makes cultural integration all the more problematic" (p. 112). Literacy education, therefore, even when packaged for lower-level users, is still multifaceted and complex in the transmission and development of the conglomeration of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Street (2009) affirms that literacy scholars cannot only look at linguistic structures or only examine culture when researching literacy, but should instead recognize their connections. The complex nature of ESL literacy development in a globalized world therefore necessitates a comprehensive examination of the bifurcated notions of literacy, creating a methodology that equally analyzes functional and sociocultural literacy.

To situate this conversation within textbooks, the University of Northern Colorado's Adult Education and Family Literacy Course explains that ESL textbooks should be "culturally sensitive [and] oriented to the language and literacy needs of the learners" (Weddel, 2018). However, in spite of this knowledge about literacy's complex nature, the need to orient materials to learners' needs, and Matsuda's (2006) myth of linguistic homogeneity, a textbook is a relatively

monolithic entity, as textbook authors have to create a text that is general enough that it can be used by multiple people. However, learners (even at the same proficiency level) come from many different backgrounds and arrive with varying goals. Therefore, when learners use the same textbook, it can act as a type of normative or even oppressive entity in terms of what it teaches about literacy, especially if learners do not or cannot compare their textbook's lessons with other experiences. My analysis is consequently aimed at examining both the functional and sociocultural literacy lessons in textbooks so as to uncover the manifold messages they convey in order to inform textbook users, therefore encouraging their development of agency in their user experiences.

Method

Textbook Selection

The ESL textbook market has many options, each with their own compilation of literacy pedagogies. To narrow the selection pool, I examined my intensive English program (IEP) teacher resource library. The library is housed within an IEP located in the southeastern US at a large public research university. The IEP offers a 5-level program for approximately 150 students from across the globe, with many from the Middle East and Asia. The program focuses on academic and communicative literacies and proficiencies. The IEP's teacher library has hundreds of texts, reflecting the program's wide range of pedagogies and student needs. The library has been curated over several decades and incorporates texts from across all facets of ESL instruction, thus providing a wide range of options that are typical of the selection an ESL teacher might encounter. The library is organized topically and includes sections for reading, writing, and reading *and* writing. Though it is common to teach these skills separately, the importance of acknowledging and teaching the relationships between the four main skills of ESL (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) is becoming increasingly discussed (Alghonaim, 2018; Walker & Dupuy, 2018; Kern, 2000). Sidek (2012) calls for specific attention to academic literacy. Many of the reading *and* writing textbooks claim to prioritize literacy acquisition and development, so I pulled all of the textbooks from this hybrid section. Then, following Sidek's (2012) call for specific attention to academic literacy, I narrowed the pool to textbooks with this focus. Wen-Cheng et al. (2011) explain that, in addition to relevant content, one should select a textbook that has been published within the past ten years.

From the textbooks that matched these criteria, I chose *Four Point Reading and Writing 1* (Folse, 2011), *Leap 3 Reading and Writing, High Intermediate* (Williams, 2012), and *Q: Skills for Success, Reading and Writing 5* (Caplan & Douglas, 2011) for their closeness in publication date, relative length, and self-assessed level. According to the levels professed on their covers, these textbooks should be written for low-, middle-, and high-level learners, respectively. This range is intentional to discover any possible differences between goals and values of literacy at different learning stages. Additionally, the layout of each textbook is relatively similar. Each text features at least two major readings (which are usually supplemented by smaller preface and postface texts) and one major essay or writing activity. Each textbook follows Wen-Cheng et al.'s (2011) suggestion that reading activities should have pre-reading, reading, and post-reading activities and that

writing activities should be integrated in the text. They also effectively integrate reading *and* writing tasks to present a more holistic notion of literacy than the single-skill reading or writing textbooks. I analyzed these three textbooks, hereinafter referred to as *Four Point*, *Leap*, and *Skills for Success*, first for their explicit functional literacy lessons and then for their messages (both implicit and explicit) about the sociocultural values of literate English users.

Coding for Literacy

The language acquisition notion of literacy as reading and writing plus the social-practice conceptualization of literacy resulted in my creation of two a priori categories for qualitative coding: literacy skills and ideologies of literacy. "Skill" is a term frequently used in language acquisition (see Brown, 2007); "ideology" is a common term in sociocultural literacy theory (see Gee, 2015). Here, a "literacy skill" is any type of functional skill needed to read or write and an "ideology of literacy" is a message about what it means to be literate or how literacy is portrayed in the English-speaking world. Hinkel (2014) explains that learning both literacy skills and ideologies "are essential for a successful communication to take place. In this light, teaching the language and the culture of speakers of the target language will probably become progressively more interdependent" (p. 406). I identified each instance in the textbooks that gives information about reading, writing, or literacy as a skill or ideology. These instances appear in many formats: information boxes (which include explicit language instruction, explicit reading or writing instruction, and tips for reading, writing, and academic success) and activities (which include readings, responses such as multiple choice or discussion questions, language exercises such as grammar or vocabulary builders, and written responses or essays).The following is an example of coding an information box in *Four Point*: "*Skimming* is a pre-reading strategy that will help you read more quickly and with greater understanding." (p. 3, emphasis original). In this passage, "skimming is a pre-reading strategy" was coded as a skill (something the learner needs to know how to do) and "read more quickly" was coded as an ideology (a trait valued in the literacy performance). The literacy skills were easier to code because they were largely referred to by the same name across the textbooks. The ideologies of literacy required more careful attention because these messages were less explicitly portrayed and did not have naming conventions as cohesive as most of the literacy skills. These two categories are more deeply analyzed in their respective sections of this article where I compare the data across the three textbooks to target shared skills and ideologies and interpret the implications of these messages for users.

Findings

Literacy Skills

The literacy skills in these textbooks as defined in this article are the explicit reading and writing competencies that learners can acquire to develop their literacy. The acquisition of these skills presumably results in proficiency in reading and writing in English and, consequently, literacy in English.

A Comparison of the Three Textbooks

Before examining each textbook's content, describing their layout will be helpful for understanding how content is designed, scaffolded, and portrayed. Here, I outline each of the textbooks' formatting and activities.

Four Point gives four major writing tasks per chapter. The prompts are all related to the chapter's theme but are increasingly difficult. For example, in the 300-word prompt in the chapter entitled "Astronomy," students write a summary about the reading. In the 500-word prompt, they write a process essay; the 800-word prompt is for an expository essay that requires light research. Finally, in the 1,000-word prompt, students are instructed to write a research essay that includes primary and secondary sources. The scaffolded prompts give students options to begin at a level with which they feel comfortable but offer room to grow.

Leap has the largest number of readings, with three feature readings per chapter. While this is only one more long reading than the other two textbooks, the inclusion of this additional reading emphasizes the importance of being able to read in English. While each of the readings follow the general chapter theme, such as education in chapter 2, the content of each passage is diverse and exposes the reader to new ideas, writing styles, and genres. Furthermore, each reading is longer than the one before it, which develops endurance as the student works their way through the chapter.

Skills for Success has ample opportunities for students to track their progress and develop autonomy in their literacy development. The most relevant example of this is the substantial guidance at the end of every chapter for the student to create a major composition. The textbook offers instructions for planning, writing, and revising and editing, with the latter two processes reinforcing the relationship of reading what one writes. The chapter concludes with a self-assessment to make sure the targeted skills are acquired and also a checklist of literacy learning outcomes entitled "Track Your Success" to encourage the learner in their literacy journey.

Teaching Reading and Writing Skills

In these various formats, the textbooks teach 28 distinct reading and writing skills. These 28 skills are separated into reading (see Figure 1) and writing (see Figure 2) categories. Using the coding scheme previously described, I tagged the textbook for teaching the skill if it had instructions for doing the skill, a practice section that required doing the skill, or had an informational blurb describing the importance of the skill.

An initial review of Figures 1 and 2 shows that the textbooks are much more homogenous in the reading skills than the writing skills they teach. Overall, the total number of reading skills taught by the textbooks is fewer than the total number of writing skills. However, the textbooks more frequently teach the same reading skills than writing skills. Consequently, based on the rates of appearance, it seems that the skills needed to read are more widely agreed upon than those needed to write.

Figure 1
Reading Skills

Skills	***Four Point***	***Leap***	***Skills for Success***
Ability to read a variety of texts	X	X	X
Active reading	X	X	X
Comprehension	X	X	X
Evaluating texts	X	X	X
Having pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies	X	X	X
Information retention and recall	X	X	X
Interpreting graphics	X		
Read advanced texts	X	X	X
Scanning	X	X	
Skimming	X	X	
Understanding abbreviations	X	X	
Vocabulary development	X	X	X

The variances continue when analyzing this data by level. In Figures 1 and 2, the textbooks are organized left to right by their professed level. Looking at the reading skills, *Four Point*, the lowest level textbook, teaches every skill identified and *Leap* teaches almost every skill. Meanwhile, *Skills for Success*, while it teaches many of the identified skills, noticeably lacks several skills. These four skills that *Skills for Success* does not include, however, are likely skills that a student would already know by the time they reach a high enough proficiency to select the highest-level textbook in its series. This reflects assumptions that higher-level textbook writers make about the literacy of their users.

This trend is not reflected in the writing skills, however (Figure 2). In comparison to the reading skills, this data reveals a considerable lack of focus on writing skills in the *Leap* textbook. Meanwhile, the lowest- and highest-level textbooks each identify 13 writing skills for their users. Before analyzing the data, I hypothesized that the highest-level textbook would have the most writing skills because its users, the supposedly most advanced students, would most likely be in or preparing for academic situations that require them to write. The data, however, reveals that writing skills are valued at both high and low levels. The middle-level textbook, though, while its

cover describes it as having "detailed guidance in the writing process" comparatively does not prepare its users for writing as thoroughly as the other two textbooks. These results portray somewhat contradictory messages of which literacy skills are valued and when. Despite these discrepancies, each textbook maintains unique qualities that could be added to the others to make them more successful for encouraging literacy and implementing tools that students can use in the future to develop their literacy regardless of their level.

Figure 2
Writing Skills

Skills	***Four Point***	***Leap***	***Skills for Success***
Ability to write a variety of texts	X	X	X
Annotating	X	X	X
Conducting research and using it in compositions	X		X
Information synthesis	X		X
Outlining	X		X
Paraphrasing		X	X
Persuasion	X		
Revision	X		X
Spelling	X		X
Summarizing	X		X
Writing citations		X	
Writing thesis statements	X		
Writing with linear organization	X		X
Understanding the audience	X		X
Varied sentence structure		X	X
Varied vocabulary	X	X	X

The Reciprocal Nature of Reading and Writing

Even though the textbooks still isolate reading-specific and writing-specific skills, as hybrid reading *and* writing textbooks, they also give certain messages about how the skills work together and inform each other. A primary literacy message from these textbooks is that reading and writing influence one another. *Four Point* writes that "students are expected to proceed from what they learned via the reading passages to writing academically" (p. xii) but also underlines the importance of writing compositions that will be read (p. 212). This dichotomy teaches students that a literate person is therefore not just a reader or just a writer, but both. This corresponds with *Skills for Success*'s lesson that the writer and reader have a connection. The textbook explains that writers do not always give "the ideas to the reader directly. The reader has to determine, or infer, what the writer is saying" (p. 117). This lesson shows students that an important part of literacy is being able to navigate this relationship and determine their role within it.

Additionally, the textbooks demonstrate that reading and writing reinforce one another. In *Leap*, students learn that annotating a text (a writing skill) is one way that they can process, remember, and recall the information they read (p. 62). *Skills for Success* echoes that students should try to write sentences using new vocabulary words they encounter in their reading so they can practice using them correctly (p. 128).

Finally, the structure of the textbooks shows students that reading and writing should not be isolated tasks. Rather, the text a student reads and the text a student writes should influence one another. In the majority of reading-specific textbooks, following a reading passage, there will be some written response but it is in the relatively superficial format of multiple choice or short answer questions. Similarly, many writing-specific textbooks may give a short reading passage to inspire a prompt but do not feature many lengthy readings. While *Four Point*, *Leap*, and *Skills for Success* also feature multiple choice and short answer questions and do not have novel-length reading passages, what differentiates them is their inclusion of long answer questions, academic skill writing (e.g. writing a research article citation), essay writing prompts, and longer texts for reading and analysis.

Overall, while none of the textbooks offer substantial explanations as to why reading and writing should be studied in tandem, their lessons and assignments differentiate these textbooks from isolated skill textbooks and help underscore the importance of both reading and writing in literacy acquisition.

Ideologies of Literacy

The ideologies of literacy as explained in this article are the beliefs surrounding literacy in the target culture, which, here, is Anglophone culture. Summarizing Shirley Brice Heath, Feng (2009) writes that "language ideology is defined as the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interest" (p. 152). Just as it is crucial that students learn the aforementioned functional literacy skills, it is equally as important for them to understand the sociocultural aspects of literacy. To that end, I will analyze the textbooks' content within both nation-specific culture and general Anglophone culture to ascertain what these textbooks promote as ideologies—values, practices, traits, etc.—that literate hopefuls should know and adopt.

Nations Within the Anglophone World

To begin understanding the identities of these textbooks as they relate to a certain country, I first investigated their publishing country and the nationalities of their authors/editors. *Four Point* is published by University of Michigan Press in Ann Arbor, Michigan, US. The series editor, Keith S. Folse, is from the US and in the acknowledgements, thanks reviewers of the textbook, all of whom work at institutions in the US. *Leap* is published by Pearson in Montréal, Canada, in spite of Pearson being a British company. The textbook editor, Julia Williams, is Canadian and in the acknowledgements, thanks the reviewers of the textbook, all of whom work at Canadian institutions. Finally, *Skills for Success* is published by Oxford University Press in Oxford, England. While author Nigel A. Caplan is British, co-author Scott Roy Douglas is Canadian, and the consultants are all from the US, making this the most diverse textbook in terms of nationalities represented in the writing and publishing process. These three publishers have been intentionally selected to examine any cultural differences between textbooks published in three different English-speaking countries. Davies and Gardner (2015) explain that "higher education students from non-English speaking backgrounds face a formidable challenge in trying to acquire adequate levels of English academic literacy" while studying in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain specifically. They say it is therefore crucial to explore "the complex demands placed on such learners [that have] sparked a number of important […] innovations […] to support academic literacy needs" (p. 180), which, in this case, are reading *and* writing textbooks. Since Davies and Gardner (2015) say that students studying in these countries have such difficulty acquiring academic literacy, I prioritized analyzing if the nation-related struggles also applied to textbooks produced in or by people from the same countries.

These textbooks, however, do not show an overwhelming amount of explicitly stated country-specific cultural bias. The only textbook to make overt references to their country of publishing is *Leap*. At the beginning of the textbook, *Leap* discloses that it uses "reading passages from a variety of predominately Canadian sources" (p. iv). Following this Canadian allegiance, the textbook employs Canadian English (CanE). *Four Point* also uses the dialect of its publisher's country, American English (AmE), but the British-published *Skills for Success* also uses AmE instead of British English (BrE). All electing nation-based dialects, none of the textbooks mention English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) or discuss the dialectal differences posed in variations of ELF. *Skills for Success*, though, does explain the importance of being able to identify the target audience and acknowledges the importance of having literacy in both AmE and BrE to be successful (p. 210). These dialectal decisions reveal that while the country of publishing does more often than not influence the language, since the dialects used are used consistently throughout each textbook, they probably will not overwhelm learners to the extent that Davies and Gardner (2015) describe within classrooms. Furthermore, since there are no nation-specific emblems (e.g. flags) plastered throughout the pages, descriptions of certain cultural practices, or discussions of how one dialect or country is better or worse than another, these textbooks seem, at first glance, to be relatively neutral regarding national cultures.

This is not to say, though, that they are actually void of certain biases. First, all of the aforementioned authors/editors are white. Second, the specific and singular attention to AmE, BrE, and CanE reflects a preference for these more dominant forms of English and, as they are

tied to particular countries, those countries' cultures. This notion of English changing within subcultures of the Anglophone umbrella culture can be daunting to learners, especially because narrowing "the English-speaking community" to white, privileged dialect users can be exclusionary. Even though the textbooks do not overwhelmingly make overt endorsements for certain dialects or cultures, by not including other forms or peoples, the textbooks are complicit in upholding hegemonic language ideologies. Consequently, there *is* a greater cultural bias than it may seem, but it is guised under the "dialect" of academic English, thus rendering covert the messages about the currency of certain literacies.

The subcultures, dominating on their own, when unified, form the perhaps even more powerful Anglophone culture and its ideologies of literacy that, as portrayed by the textbooks, all English speakers hold. A main message across the textbooks is the pervasiveness of literacy in the English-speaking community and the importance of literacy as a means to communicate with native speakers to avoid prejudice. *Four Point* makes multiple references to the notion that millions of people can read in English (p. 109, p. 126). This creates the impression that since so many people can read in English, to not be able to read in English is to be part of the out-group—the illiterates. *Four Point* continues this notion of an illiteracy out-group by saying that "ELLs [English Language Learners] realize that they are way behind their native-speaker counterparts" (p. xi). *Leap* criticizes learners who do not have enough literacy to be understood (p. 31) and *Skills for Success* marks learners without high enough literacy as sounding unnatural (p. 18). *Leap* states outright to learners that "you need to learn English to accomplish your goals" (p. 81). Messages on how to avoid illiteracy and become a culturally-accepted literate in the "English-speaking community" are inserted throughout the textbooks. Kachru's (1985) notion of an "inner circle" of English speakers is useful for understanding the hierarchy of this community, especially when tied to the fact that these textbooks are from Canada, the UK, and the US. The following traits are those identified by interpreting said messages about the characteristics of how a "literate English user" acts, thinks, appears, and behaves.

Speed

Speed is one of the most discussed values of literacy in the textbooks, appearing in multiple contexts. One such context is learning language and becoming literate quickly. "Successful language learners understand the following key points that allow them to learn quickly" (*Leap*, p. 81) is a proclamation preceding a long list of ways that students can speed up their literacy acquisition. Also important is the speed in which the learner can complete a task. "Do <u>not</u> read slowly and carefully. See how quickly you can find the answer. Raise your hand as soon as you are finished to show your instructor that you have finished" (p. 4, emphasis original) are instructions repeatedly given for activities in *Four Point*. *Four Point* also shares that "research on what good readers do" shows they are efficient (p. 99). *Leap* tells students that "you will want to read fast" (p. 56), and *Skills for Success* instructs learners to "speed up your reading comprehension" (p. 239), corroborating the pressure that language learners have to complete literacy tasks quickly. This purports that literacy conducted with speed is more valuable than literacy practiced at a slower pace. Speed seems to be an Anglophone cultural phenomenon that is valued in more than just academic literacy acquisition. Phrases such as "hurry up," "make

haste," and "the need for speed" are widespread in English while phrases related to slowness are less pervasive and usually carry a negative connotation, like "painfully slow." As students see this ideology enacted in the language and culture, they will begin to realize the importance of quickly developing their literacy and being able to practice literacy skills with speed in order to be successfully literate in English. There is no evidence of students being encouraged to take their time or that a decelerated pace would perhaps allow for more deeply developed skills.

Linearity

In Kaplan's (1966) *Patterns of Written Discourse* graphic, he created a now-famous and widely cited, if not sometimes misinterpreted or invalidated, conception of how five different languages/language families organize their written discourse. The most direct pattern is English's, which is portrayed as a straight line. This greatly contrasts from the atypical shapes for (using Kaplan's terms) "Semitic," "Romance," and "Russian" languages, or the spiral for "Oriental" languages. This linear organization is strongly associated with English texts, as demonstrated by the textbooks' overwhelming encouragement to use it. *Four Point* says that the reader needs an "easy text pattern to follow" (p. 159), that "good writing" is unified and coherent (p. 196), and that writers should be direct (p. 65). *Skills for Success* explains that "in good writing, each paragraph has unity: it explores one idea" and warns that "if you mix different ideas in a paragraph, your readers may become confused, and your writing will not be effective" (p. 100). *Skills for Success* underlines the importance of coherency, logic, and unity (p. 129, p. 158) but never directly explains what these words mean, assuming that the language learner has the same concepts of linear organization as the authors. The textbooks' message to users is that literate English speakers follow a linear thought pattern and that, in order to be literate, one must be able to align themselves with this manner of reading, writing, and thinking. While being able to organize text in the same method of the target language is important, the unrelenting push for linear organization does not allow any room for multilingual students to value the perhaps different schema in their primary language and/or culture. The textbooks' insistence on linear organization in texts demonstrates this as the only type of thought that is accepted and used in academic English literacy.

Strength

According to the textbooks, a truly literate person in English should not only wield the aforementioned literacy skills but be able to perform them with strength. *Leap* tells students that they need to "practice, assessing their own strengths and weaknesses; make plans to help develop their weakest language skills" (p. 81). While *Skills for Success* does not use the word "strong," it offers several examples of what writers can do to strengthen their writing that the other two textbooks also identify as strengths: writing should be interesting and meaningful (p. 268, p. 269, p. 271), varied (p. 46), memorable (p. 268), and sophisticated (p. 98) yet natural (p. 248). *Four Point* tells students, "Your goal is to make the overall work stronger. There are several things you should check when you are revising: content, grammar, punctuation, spelling. Although this process can be time-consuming, it ensures that you will turn in a stronger piece of writing" (p. 69). Strength emerges as a key identity trait for people who are literate in English and this

portrayal effectively demonstrates that anything that a literate person would consider "weak" is a marker of illiteracy in English. Since literacy is obviously a key goal for the reading *and* writing textbook user, developing strong literacy skills, particularly those noted by the textbooks, will likely become a priority for the student. While well-developed skills are emphasized in learning any language, these textbooks insist upon the necessity of remedying inadequate English skills. It seems, though, that the textbooks are well-intentioned in their desire to strengthen student literacy. *Leap* informs students that literacy acquisition bolsters confidence and raises the chances of being understood (p. 33). The stronger a student's literacy is, the less susceptible they will be to criticism or questioning of their status as literate—a common concern for ESL speakers. This ideology of strength attempts to condition students with the skills and traits necessary for being in the in-group.

Personality

The final ideology identified within the textbooks is the perceived personality of a literate Anglophone. The textbooks provide several descriptors of the type of person who will become literate in English. According to *Four Point*, those who are most likely to become literate persevere (p. xiv) and combat low motivation with goal setting (p. 39). It also agrees with *Leap*, saying that literate hopefuls ask questions to learn more (*Leap*, p. 33; *Four Point*, p. 201). *Leap* adds that students should "remain positive—even when faced with frustration," actively practice literacy skills, and study independently to improve their overall literacy (p. 81). Finally, *Skills for Success* identifies an analytical person as one who will become literate (p. 116). If the student follows all of these suggestions, they will "achieve language proficiency" (p. x), one marker that *Skills for Success* recognizes as essential for developing literacy in English. While the textbooks do not condemn those without these personality traits, they imply that the type of person that best fits with the at-large Anglophone community is the one who maintains these qualities. By teaching this ideology, the textbooks apprise students of certain characteristics they should develop over the course of their literacy acquisition. While it may not be easy for a learner to adapt, these textbooks at least equip students with the cultural knowledge needed to join the literate community.

Following these sociocultural ideologies of literacy as described by the textbooks, if a person can learn to read with speed, compose with linearity, strengthen their literacy skills, and adhere to a certain personality, then they should, theoretically, be able to achieve literacy in the academic English these textbooks are marketing. "[Language] involves a contextualized and critical view of literacy with a deep understanding of the underlying cultural dimensions" (Hanneman and Scarpino, 2016, p. 11), and textbook users can be dependent upon textbooks to gain this insight and access to literacy in the target language. The ideologies of literacy are as equally important as the literacy skills; understanding literacy ideologies equips a learner to make meaningful use of their functional skills, which can allow them to use their literacy beyond the confines of their textbook (Warner & Dupuy, 2018).

Conclusion

Literacy, UNESCO says, is "an important symbol of identity, unity and self-determination. It is closely intertwined with culture and local values, wisdom, worldviews and tradition" (Hanneman & Scarpino, 2016, p. 17). Language learners using literacy textbooks likely recognize literacy as this key to acceptance from speakers of the target language and practitioners of its culture. To what extent do these textbooks guide students along the path to literacy? Unfortunately, none of these textbooks are perfect. However, they all make an important step by uniting reading and writing so that students can begin to understand the relationship between texts and the importance the target culture places on the ability to both interpret and produce text. When using these textbooks, though, students should approach the lessons in their pages with some caution. As demonstrated, different textbooks prioritize different skills and ideologies. While this is unavoidable since there is no official manual to academic English literacy and the authors/editors all introduce biases and assumptions about literacy and language learning and teaching, students should utilize multiple resources (e.g. different textbooks, other materials, etc.) and, while keeping the skills and ideologies in mind, be empowered to develop their own literate identity.

The implications of this textbook analysis are twofold. First, textbook publishers would be wise to include some sort of definition of what they mean by the level that they put on the cover. This delineation would help users—department textbook selectors, teachers, and learners—to identify the baseline literacy stage of a textbook's target audience. Such informed decision-making offers more agency within the selection process. Second, following many claims in applied linguistics for authentic learning opportunities, providing more relevant details on various contexts where learners might practice academic English literacy can help make the learning more meaningful and help them transfer their textbook learning to real-world situations. In this vein, recognizing that there are opportunities across the globe to use English (not just Canada, the UK, and the US) will be useful for adopting an approach more oriented towards World Englishes that does not reify ethnocentric ideologies. These suggestions, however, although salient, are aimed at a population much smaller than the other side of the textbook equation: teachers and students.

Even if textbook publishers made revisions, the reality is that all language teaching is going to feature the qualities found in these three textbooks; they will all prioritize certain skills and be imbued with various sociocultural meanings. It is therefore prudent to focus on helping teachers and language learners understand how to raise awareness and use these textbooks in more meaningful ways. Teachers can help students (or independent learners can do it on their own) identify their learning goals, in terms of both the functional and sociocultural elements of language and literacy acquisition. Then, students can be more attuned to the lessons in their textbooks and calibrate those messages into the type of language user they aspire to be. This calibration will be ongoing as learners will continue to define, develop, and refine their literate identity and refashion it as they encounter new literacy situations across various linguistic and cultural domains. Being able to identify their own goals and evaluate language materials is a skill that will benefit them far beyond using any given textbook and hopefully empower them to see literacy development as liberatory and not oppressive. All three of the textbooks echo: "You need

to learn English to accomplish your goals" (*Leap*, p. 81). It is important, then, that students identify what those goals are. Recognition that textbooks are proffering certain messages and attention to how those messages align with one's own goals will help learners be able to develop the type of empowered literate identity UNESCO (Hanneman & Scarpino, 2016) describes.

As the English-speaking community continues to grow, become more literate, and place a greater value on literacy, English language learners will be compelled to develop their literacy skills. In response to this need, ESL textbook writers are creating materials such as the ones analyzed here that focus on developing literacy. These textbooks are goal-oriented and pragmatic. This analysis reveals the complex but necessary role literacy takes in English learners' academic trajectories and uncovers the impact textbooks have on users' literacy development. My analysis takes a poststructuralist approach by only identifying the functional and sociocultural literacy lessons in these texts. The main finding from this approach is the realization that, behind a "neutral" façade is a complex Inner Circle Discourse. The functional literacy lessons cannot be neutral; language and culture are inherently tightly woven. The result here is an implicit prioritization of white, standardized, Inner Circle English academic literacy with no attempts at including other English users. The next step is to more critically examine the ramifications of these messages, particularly through a student lens, when examining the relationships between language learning, literate identity, citizenship, and power while developing English literacies in a globalized world. As textbook writers and users continue to negotiate literacy in the pages of the textbooks they write and read, it will remain critical that the skills and ideologies of literacy are carefully examined, not in a way that undermines or replaces the user's native language and literate identity, but rather, empowers them to mindfully incorporate it into their multicompetent, multiliterate identity in English.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr. Charlotte Brammer for her insightful feedback and encouragement as well as the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their suggestions.

References

Alghonaim, A. S. (2018). Explicit ESL/EFL reading-writing connection: An issue to explore in ESL/EFL settings. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 8*(4), 385-392.

Bormuth, J. R. (1973). Reading literacy: Its definition and assessment. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *9*(1), 7-66.

Brandt, D., & Clinton, K. (2002). Limits of the local: Expanding perspectives on literacy as a social practice. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *34*(3), 337-356. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15548430jlr3403_4

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (3rd ed.). Pearson Longman.

Caplan, N. A., & Douglas, S. R. (2011). *Q: Skills for success, reading and writing*. Oxford University Press.

Case, R. E., Ndura, E., & Righettini, M. (2005). Balancing linguistic and social needs: Evaluating texts using a critical language awareness approach. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 48*(5), 374-391. https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.48.5.2

Crystal, D. (2010). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Currie, P., & Cray, E. (2004). ESL literacy: Language practice or social practice? *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *13*, 111-132. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.04.008

Davies, M. & Dee, G. (2015). Corpus-based vocabulary support for university reading and writing. In. N. W. Evans, N. J. Anderson, & W. Eggington (Eds.), *ESL readers and writers in higher education: Understanding challenges, providing support* (pp. 180-197). Routledge.

Feng, H. (2009). Different languages, different cultures, different language ideologies, different linguistic models. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, *4*(2), 151-164.

Ferris, D. (2015). "Supporting multilingual writers through the challenges of academic literacy: Principles of English for academic purposes and composition instruction." In. N. W. Evans, N. J. Anderson, & W. Eggington (Eds.), *ESL readers and writers in higher education: Understanding challenges, providing support* (pp. 147-163). Routledge.

Folse, K. S. (2011). *Four point: Reading and writing, intermediate EAP.* University of Michigan Press.

Gee, J. (2015). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (5th ed.). Taylor & Francis Group.

Gilliland, B. (2015). Reading, writing, and learning English in an American high school classroom. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, *27*(2), 272-293.

Grady, K. (1997). Critically reading an ESL text. *TESOL Journal, 6*(4), 7-10.

Hanneman, U., & Scarpino, C. (2016). *Literacy in multilingual and multicultural contexts: effective approaches to adult learning and education*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.

Hinkel, E. (2014). Culture and pragmatics in language teaching and learning. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton, & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed.) (pp. 394-408). National Geographic Learning and Heinle Cengage Learning.

Hull, G. (1993). Hearing other voices: A critical assessment of popular views on literacy and work. *Harvard Educational Review, 63*(1), 20-50.

Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification, and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge University Press.

Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, *16*, 1-20.

Kern, R. (2000). *Literacy and language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Lam, W. S. E. (2013). Multilingual practices in transnational digital contexts. *TESOL Quarterly*, *47*(4), 820-825. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.132

Matsuda, P. K. (2006). The myth of linguistic homogeneity in U.S. college composition. *College English*, *68*(6), 637-651. https://doi.org/10.2307/25472180

Molle, D. (2015). Introduction. In D. Molle, E. Soto, T. Boals, & C. A. Hedgspeth (Eds.), *Multilingual learners and academic literacies: Sociocultural contexts of literacy development in adolescents* (pp. 1-10). Routledge.

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, *66*(1), 60-92.

Pennycook, A. (1998). *English and the discourses of colonialism*. Routledge.
Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press.
Sidek, H. M. (2012). EFL textbook analysis: A case study. *Language and Literacy*, *14*(3), 27-45.
Street, B. V. (2009). Foreword. In C. Lewis, P. Enciso, & E. B. Moje (Eds.), *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy: Identity, agency, and power* (pp. vii-x). Routledge.
Thompson, K. D. (2013). Representing language, culture, and language users in textbooks: A critical approach to Swahili multiculturalism. *The Modern Language Journal*, *97*(4), 947-964.
Tsui, A. B. M., & Tollefson, J. W. (Eds.). (2006). *Language policy, culture, and identity in Asian contexts.* Lawrence Erlbaum.
Viera, K. (2016). *American by paper: How documents matter in immigrant literacy*. University of Minnesota Press.
Warner, C., & Dupuy, B. (2018). Moving toward multiliteracies in foreign language teaching: Past and present perspectives…and beyond. *Foreign Language Annals*, *51*(1), 116-128.
Weddel, K. S. (2009). *How to choose a good ESL textbook for adult education and family literacy learners*. University of Northern Colorado Adult Education and Family Literacy Study Course. Retrieved 26 November, 2018, from http://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/cdeadult/download/ncpdrc/howtochoosegoodesltextbook.pdf.
Wen-Cheng, W., Chieng-Hung, L., & Chung-Chieh, L. (2011). Thinking of the textbook in the ESL/EFL classroom. *English Language Teaching*, *4*(2), 91-96.
Williams, J. (2012). *Leap 3: Reading and writing, high intermediate.* Pearson.
Williams, B. T. (2009). Multilingual literacy strategies in online worlds. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, *29*(1/2), 255-259.

About the author

Analeigh E. Horton is a PhD student and Graduate Assistant Director of the Writing Program at the University of Arizona. This project began during her MA at the University of Alabama. She researches multilingual and international student experiences with writing and literacy, WAC/WID, and program administration. Analeigh is a Fulbright alumna and has taught in China, Mexico, Spain, the UK, and the US. Her work has appeared in *MidSouth Literacy Journal* and *Computers and Composition*.