

The Representation of Britain in BBC English Learning Website: Promoting Electronic Colonialism

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Abstract

The Internet is already an essential element of education in all developed countries and its worldwide educational significance will continue to increase due to its constant technological development, communicative power, and social potential. Internet-mediated English learning has lately attracted both English teachers and learners due to the numerous advantages including the increased accessibility, quick information retrieval, flexibility in the pace of learning, etc. In spite of their popularity, the Internet-mediated English learning materials have rarely been critically analyzed. The present study aimed to critically investigate *LingoHack* lessons of BBC English Learning Website which claims to teach new words and phrases through watching and reading the transcripts of the latest BBC World News bulletin, trying to investigate whether these educational materials were promoting different aspects of electronic colonialism. This is a theory proposed by McPhail (1987) which tries to discover and uncover the colonial goals of multimedia giants produced in the core countries which seek to control the minds of people from the periphery countries. Thus, the lessons that were published from the beginning of the year 2016 to the end of the year 2017 were searched for the key term *Britain* plus its directly and indirectly related items both electronically and manually and 77 out of 270 news articles were found to contain the key terms. The corpus was analyzed by being classified based on their subject matters into three categories: Britain's science and technology (26 news stories), Britain's health and lifestyle (42 news stories), and Britain's politics (9 news stories). Applying Van Dijk's (2004) Ideological Square Model of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the researchers attempted to critically analyze the representation of *Britain* within BBC news lessons in terms of

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their hidden potential curriculum. Ideological Square Model accounts for the ways discourses represent groups of people in a process of polarization between *Us* and *Them* through: (a) emphasizing information that is positive about *Us*, (b) emphasizing information that is negative about *Them*, (c) de-emphasizing information that is positive about *Them*, and (d) de-emphasizing information that is negative about *Us* (van Dijk, 1998, p. 267). Van Dijk believed in a hierarchy of power in which those who are able to influence and control people's minds can indirectly control their actions through persuasion and manipulation as well. Therefore, his model plus 27 strategies for ideological discourse analysis listed by van Dijk (2004) were suitable for exploring the manipulations applied to the target educational materials in this study. In order to answer the research question, all BBC news video transcripts from *LingoHack* lessons involving the key terms were critically analyzed and noteworthy results were obtained and since the CDA analysis of all these news stories were too long to be included in this article, 6 samples from those presenting the manipulative functions of the target ELT content were discussed in detail. Even before considering CDA analysis, BBC Online appeared to be biased in selecting news video stories as ELT materials which were claimed to be international, while there existed plenty of British stories. The findings for the first category revealed that BBC Internet-mediated lessons have had manipulative purposes in choosing particular news stories and attempting to obtain illegitimate domination through the formation of biased mental models offered by emphasizing positive information about Britain's superior scientific and technological capabilities. Similarly, critical analysis from the second category showed that Britain as a core country also attempted to advertise its own values and norms through selecting biased news articles within health and lifestyle domain which tried to direct the audience's attention toward ideal and high quality living conditions in Britain. Findings from the third category also revealed that Britain was presented positively as a powerful and supportive country in political news stories and that was a true example of promoting electronic colonialism. On the whole, BBC Internet-mediated English learning program was found to promote certain British ideological values, scientific superiorities, and political messages through applying particular discursive structures that tend to describe in-group members in a positive or at least neutral way. Developing such an ideal British mentality in English learners was on the basis of a hidden curriculum which tried to promote a new kind of colonialism. So, as McPhail's (2006) Electronic Colonialism Theory postulates, long term exposure to these English learning materials would threaten individuals' perception of their identity and culture and disseminate British norms and values. Therefore, the Website users need to be conscious of the secret threats of the Internet technology and develop critical view in order to be wise autonomous learners. The researchers also have to closely investigate the one-way flow of media messages from the core to the peripheral countries, including online English educational materials and the purposes of the producing nations as well as the influences on receiving nations.

Keywords: Internet-Mediated English Education, Electronic Colonialism Theory, Hidden Curriculum, Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dijk's Ideological Square Model.