

Ideology in Hungarian Morality Textbooks

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Abstract

Ideology is sometimes considered as equivalent sets of ideas not affected by hegemonic power relations, as Karl Mannheim's relativist theory would put it, for instance. It is also sometimes considered more critically, as set of ideas that are embedded in hegemonic power relations, and whose political aim is to help sustaining domination, by concealing the contradictions present in society. Drawing on the work of Jan Blommaert, Norman Fairclough, Susan Gal and Antonio Gramsci, this paper investigates in what ways hegemonic ideological meanings can be embedded in educative texts. The actual texts that are analyzed for ideological meaning are Hungarian textbooks for 1st to 8th grade students. The subject of these books is moral education (*erkölcsstan*). Moral education, which aims at influencing the students' ideas about what is desirable or right in social life and what is not, is deeply embedded in ideological systems of values. The linguistic aspects that are examined in the texts are transitivity and deontic modality. Transitivity analysis establishes which aspects of social life come to be encoded as 'reality' that can be then encoded as 'defensible' to various degrees with the help of the grammatical means of deontic modality. According to Fairclough, Hodge and Kress, the textual analysis of the different degrees of deontic modality has the potential to bring to light the different and particular social facts the text and its producers intend to frame as universally desirable. The extension of the particular to the universal is a key aspect of producing ideological meaning.

Key words: Critical Discourse Analysis, Applied Linguistics, Morality, Education.

1. Introduction

Morality textbooks reflect the various beliefs its producers, capitalist economic interests and state power hold at a given time about what is desirable and what is not, with a view to legitimize their worldview as necessary and unchangeable, which learners should be taught and empowered to adapt to. Such legitimization and universalization is an ideological practice. Indeed, as the critical feminist thinker Denise Thompson argues, “The only criterion for judging whether something is ideological is whether or not it reinforces unequal relations of ruling” (Thompson 2001: 25).

In the first part of the paper, I will investigate how ideology is embedded in educational discourse. To this end, I will mainly draw on Norman Fairclough’s approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2003); on M.A.K. Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar theory (Halliday, 1985) and Günter Kress’ and Robert Hodge’s developments of it (Hodge and Kress 1979; Hodge and Kress 1988); as well as on a Foucauldian approach to the knowledge/power system (Foucault, 1980).

In the second part of the paper, based on an analysis of transitivity and modality in the texts of morality textbooks of the 2012 Hungarian national curriculum, I will present a theory of how a particular world view gets to be represented as unchangeable, conflict-free and universally desirable. The analysis will therefore allow an explanation of how the ideologies that informs the Morality textbooks are situated in broader power relations.

2. Ideology in educational discourse

Patrick Studer claims, agreeing with Michael Billig’s view, that ideology reinforces domination by concealing contradictions present in society (Billig, 1982: 34–60; Studer, 2013: 194). In texts, the fact of silencing alternative meanings or social behaviors to the dominant norm, elevates this norm to the way “how all rational actors should act” (Lim, 2012: 484). Contradiction can be the source of practices of resistance.

2.1. Authority, discipline and morality

The curriculum is “selected and organized around sets of principles and values that come from somewhere, that represent particular views of normality and deviance, of good and bad, and of what ‘good people act like.’” (Apple, 2004: 61). Morality is the regulatory and evaluative knowledge about what is good or bad. At the curriculum level, discipline and authority can take the form of a particular discourse, what Bakhtin calls “authoritative discourse” (Bakhtin, 1981; in Pinto, 2004: 653). It is a unidirectional closed discourse, or a monologue, that doesn’t require nor allow a response: it suppresses any dialogicity with competing voices in order to bring about “a consensus, a normalization and acceptance of differences of power” (Fairclough, 2003: 42).

3. Ideological mechanisms in text

3.1. Transitivity and modality in assumptions

Assumptions are what Norman Fairclough calls the “common ground” of social interaction. The social group who exercises social power has an influence on what will be taken as “common ground” assumptions in interaction, hence “assumptions and implicitness are an important issue with respect to ideology”. Transitivity analysis explores the processes and its actors that are represented in assumptions. M.A.K. Halliday points at the six main different types of processes that can be brought to light by transitivity analysis: material processes “that express the notion that some entity ‘does something’; mental processes of “sensing” i.e. “clauses of feeling, thinking and perceiving” and relational processes of being or having, clauses for which the central meaning is that something exists (Halliday, 1985: 103–12). Three other kinds of processes cannot easily be classified as relational, mental or material. These are behavioral processes, verbal processes, and existential processes. According to M.A.K. Halliday (Halliday, 1976; in Hodge and Kress 1988: 124), “modal forms are the traces of the activity of speakers acting in a social context”. According to Hodge and Kress, in English, ambiguity between knowledge and power is embedded in modality (Hodge and Kress, 1979: 122). For example, a sentence like “he may come” can express a possibility, or an authorization; in the latter case it is named a ‘deontic modality’. Deontic modality is the modal system of duty.

3.2. Voice and agency

Objectivity can be portrayed through different linguistic devices “such as agentless passives, grammatical metaphors, or nominalization of events” (de los Heros, 2009: 180) as these are effectively hiding the agents responsible for social processes, rendering them natural and agent-free. The plurality of voices is also suggested through the use of the first person (plural and singular) and the third person. The use of first person plural signals that the values and beliefs of the group it represents are actually shared rather than imposed, and that these are superior to the values, beliefs or attitudes of the individual. (Margolin, 2001; in Pinto 2004: 657). Third person on the other hand has been the focus for Hodge and Kress, who argue that it is used to depersonalize authority, for example in the sentence “the people must be tractable and obedient” (Burke, 1958: 271).

4. Analysis of the morality Textbooks

4.1. Text selection

The texts I have chosen make up a series of textbooks published by Mozaik, Szeged, Hungary, for pupils attending primary school Morality classes in first, second, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades, i.e. for pupils aged between 6 and 14 years (Kriston Bordi and Hajduné Tölgyesi 2014; Kriston Bordi and Hajduné Tölgyesi 2015; Kapai 2015a; Kapai 2015b; Baloghne Makó 2015a; Baloghne Makó 2015b). In my analysis, I randomly selected 145 assumptions, declarative or embedded in “Why” interrogatives, and did a transitivity and modality. The translations of the Hungarian sentences to English are the paper author’s work.

4.2. Material processes

In 12 out of the 57 clauses representing material processes, the actor is represented by the first person plural form “we” that is, in Hungarian, embedded in the verb as a suffix “-unk / -uk”. First person plural is used in the textbooks in order to convey a sense of belonging to a wider community such as the people-as-nation, while opposing the “we” to the ‘other’, for instance in the sentence “Why

do we celebrate other peoples' holidays"¹ (Kriston Bordi and Hajduné Tölgyesi 2015, 54). Also, actors can be represented as part of the closer family: in seven instances, the actor of the clause is the family or one of its members: "For holidays, families often decorate their homes" (ibid, 46)². Such material clauses point out what kind of activities and, more generally, roles, are appropriate in the family.

Agency can be given to processes, feelings or concepts in the textbooks so that the real actors involved in acting in these processes or ideas remain concealed. This is the case in 13 of the material clauses in the corpus. For instance, in these, "successes" (Baloghné Makó 2015b, 32), "love of the motherland", "feeling of national unity" (ibid, 56), "life force" (Kapai, 2015a: 8) "love", "name", "thoughts" (Kriston Bordi & Hajduné Tölgyesi, 2015: 23), "feelings" (ibid), "traditions", or "rules" (Ibid: 51) are given agency in processes of doing. Such sentences carry the ideological meaning that traditions are timeless and void of any kind of conflicts or contradictions and are part of a natural order. This is what Susan Gal calls the 'authoritative speech' (Gal, 1998: 332) of traditions. Material processes can also be embedded in larger sentences where they act as subordinate clauses, i.e.: "If we love somebody, we do not envy his/her success, but we are happy about it"³ (Kapai, 2015b: 33). Thus they follow mental or relational clauses in order to instruct what the appropriate actions should ensue from feelings or from different situations in reality.

Modality does not convey uncertainties in the material clauses, it mostly appears as deontic, under the dialogical form of "why" interrogatives such as in the sentences "Why must people take independent decisions?"⁴ (Kapai, 2015b: 6), "Why must one respect the free will of others?"⁵ (ibid) or "Why is it important that family members stay in contact"⁶ (Kriston Bordi & Hajduné Tölgyesi 2015: 2). In these examples, the modal auxiliary "must" or its balanced

¹ In the original: "Miért vesszük át más népek ünnepeit?"

² In the original: "Ünnepek alkalmával a családok gyakran feldíszítik az otthonukat."

³ In the original: "Ha szeretünk valakit, nem irigyeljük a sikerét, hanem örülünk vele."

⁴ In the original: "Miért kell önálló döntéseket hoznia az embernek?"

⁵ In the original "Miért kell tisztelni mások szabad akaratát?"

⁶ In the original "Miért fontos hogy a rokonság tagjai tartsak egymással a kapcsolatot?"

quasi-equivalent “it is important that” are in present tense, which has for effect to blur the temporality of the sentences to present them as timeless and universal truths.

4.3. Mental and behavioral processes

In the corpus, 15 clauses represent mental processes of sensing, feeling, or knowing. The “sensors” are often overlapping the “actors” categories explained in part 4.2, i.e. “people”, “we”, “everyone” and “family members”; mental processes are different in the sense that they have a tendency to be more deontically modalized in the textbooks. Indeed, four of the fourteen clauses are modalized with “*kell*”, which can be translated as “have to” or “must”, for instance in the clause “Why must every people know its own roots?”⁷ (Kapai, 2015b: 47). Such examples explicitly and authoritatively specify what the desirable ways of thinking are, while concealing the agent empowered with authority.

4.4. Relational and existential processes

Relational and existential processes are not very different from each other, they both convey the meaning that things *are*. A naïve or conservatively utopian view of the family prevails in sentences such as “Fraternal love is a gift for life”⁸ (Kriston Bordi and Hajduné Tölgyesi 2015: 33) or “There are moments in the year, the week and the day when the whole family is together”⁹ (ibid). Such sentences may make some readers ill at ease, especially those whose family life is not similar to the ones depicted in the textbooks. In this case, relational processes of being and possessing inform an ideological meaning that intends to conceal conflicts in the family by naturalizing a utopian version of it, in order to win over the pupils to this representation for their future life. Indeed, according to Pinto (Pinto 2004: 664), such utopian language aims at imposing a reality different from the world already experienced by the children, and make it look like a desirable privilege.

⁷ In the original: “Miért kell minden népnek megismernie saját gyökereit?”

⁸ In the original: “A testvéri szeretet egy életre szolo ajándék.”

⁹ In the original: “A napnak, hétnek, évnek vannak olyan időpontjai, amikor együtt van az egész család.”

Similarly to material clauses in which deontic modality evaluated some actions as more desirable than others, relational clauses also evaluate things as “needed”, “good”, or “important”: “Why is it important that relatives keep in touch with each other”¹⁰ (Kriston Bordi and Hajduné Tölgyesi 2015: 28); “Why is it good for people to go to church?”¹¹ (Ibid: 65); “In your opinion, why are holidays needed in the life of people?”¹² (Kapai, 2015a); “Every person needs successes”¹³ (Baloghné Makó 2015b: 32) or “Why is appropriate clothing important?”¹⁴ (Kriston Bordi & Hajduné Tölgyesi, 2014: 25). The fact that “why” interrogatives are used to convey such assumptions is not innocent: it provides an illusion of dialogue and reinforce the certainty and the security of the assumption or moral rule, which is pre-existing and taken for granted; in other words, what is expected from the reader is not to discuss whether things are or are not, but to justify why they are the way they are (*already*).

Things can also be presented as merely existing, without an evaluative component but as normal and natural occurrences. This is the meaning embedded in existential processes. Such clauses traditions, poverty, and inequalities as part of the natural order of the world: “In the life of every people, there are traditions that have survived for a long time”¹⁵ (Kriston Bordi and Hajduné Tölgyesi 2014, 50); “Like everywhere in the world, the financial situation of people also differ in Hungary. There are very rich people, and very poor people as well.”¹⁶ (Baloghné Makó 2015b: 44);

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the Morality textbooks showed that ideological meanings can prevail in affirmations in which the topic is related to people’s interpersonal relationships. These come to be naturalized as conflict-free social relations, sometimes according to naïve or

¹⁰ In the original: “Miért fontos hogy a rokonság tagjai tartsak egymással a kapcsolatot”

¹¹ In the original: “Miért jó az embereknek templomba járni?”

¹² In the original: “Szerinted miért kellene ünnepnek az ember életébe?”

¹³ In the original: “Minden embernek szüksége van sikerélményre.”

¹⁴ In the original: “Miért fontos az alkalom illő ruházat?”

¹⁵ In the original: “Minden nép életében vannak hagyományok, amelyek régóta fennmaradnak.”

¹⁶ In the original: “Mint mindenhol a világon, Magyarországon is különböző az emberek anyagi helyzete. Vannak nagyon gazdagok és nagyon szegények is.”

conservatively utopian representations. Inciting the readers to conform to the status quo is one of the main ideological effects of the textbooks analyzed. Transitivity analysis showed that textbooks represent the world as based on timeless institutions such as the nation, the family and the broader economic system. Social agents have to conform to these, acting in the 'appropriate' ways dictated by the moral rules. Such authority is at stake in the classroom and may not be as straightforwardly accepted as the textbook authors or curriculum planners expect it to be. Indeed, according to Gore (Gore 1999: 280; in Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001: 875), practices of schooling actually distribute the power within the classroom. She sees the relations of power as changeable and emphasizes the relevance of research at the micro-level of classroom interaction to demonstrate the circulation of power in a given classroom context.

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