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## Countering hegemonic ELT materials in Asian EFL contexts

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to engage in attempts to problematize hegemony associated with ELT materials, especially in EFL settings. Social transformative perspectives will shed light on the role of agency through collective actions of social power by English language teachers, teacher educators, and students in possibly 1) critiquing forms of hegemony (i.e., dominant use of standard [academic] English and avoidance to [controversial] themes related to social justice) in ELT materials, and 2) envisioning transformative strategies that may challenge the hegemony being critiqued. Transformative strategies on the part of social power represented by TESOL practitioners, as well as English learners, may or may not involve state/bourgeois power. More importantly, when these strategies are seriously implemented, though not necessarily in a massive scale, EFL instructors and students may defy socioeconomic, linguistic, cultural, and academic hegemony due to reliance on using many materials (e.g., textbooks) available in the market. Some attempts to produce locally published or customize materials are envisioned based on some current practices gleaned from the ELT-related literature and my observation as an EFL teacher educator in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** ELT materials, hegemony, agency, social power, transformation, TESOL

### Introduction

English language teachers, especially those in EFL settings are likely to challenge forms of hegemony associated with the use of ELT materials in primary, secondary, and college-level (or undergraduate) education. By 'ELT materials' here I mean texts, primarily coursebooks or

multimedia available in the market or on the Internet, that are prepared by EFL teachers for their students to learn English language skills (i.e., reading, listening, speaking, and writing) at school or college-level education. Prior to addressing how to confront forms of hegemony, I will first focus on what hegemony means. In Gramsci's (1971) view, hegemony is characterized by

... 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant ... group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (p. 12)

The dominant group under scrutiny here is a worldwide aggregate of English-(non)native-speaking teachers who are in favor of 'mainstream' (and hegemonic) learning materials, especially textbooks and online/offline multimedia accompaniments used for learning English reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills, which are produced by Western (or even state-mandated, local) authors at times relying on profit-oriented publishers.<sup>1</sup> In the context of general education Apple (1984) states:

How is... 'legitimate' [or hegemonic] knowledge made available in schools? By and large it is through... the textbook. While the text dominates curricula at the elementary, secondary, and even college levels, very little attention has been paid to the ideological, political, and economic sources of its production, distribution, and reception. (p. 309)

This observation also seems to ring true in materials for TESOL, especially when they are developed for preparing students with various levels of English proficiency to take high-stakes, standardized tests like national exams, college entrance exams, or TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). More characteristics of mainstream materials in TESOL will be discussed in the Diagnosis and Critique section below.

To actualize transformation by problematizing the hegemony of mainstream ELT materials, TESOL educators can learn to be realistic utopians, to adapt Wright's (2010) book title *Envisioning Real Utopias*. Why does being realistic utopians matter for these educators, especially in non-English-speaking countries? In view of Wright, it is crucial for TESOL educators to be realistic utopians who are capable of 1) diagnosing and critiquing forms of hegemony in English learning materials, 2) finding alternatives to resist such hegemony, and 3) envisioning social transformations through the lens of TESOL. English teacher educators,

together with in-service teachers at schools, are potential motors for social transformation in English language education. There has been a growing literature on critical approaches to TESOL, especially in terms of the existence and utilization of print-based and/or software-based ELT materials (e.g., Akbari, 2008; Crookes, 2013 [chapter 2]; Gray, 2010; Hinkelman & Gruba, 2012; Pessoa & Freitas, 2012; Preuss & Morway, 2012; Shin & Crookes, 2005a, b). However, attention to increasing social (em)power(ment) with, or without, state assistance to challenge capitalism (or global, hegemonic economic power) sometimes backed up by state regulations still needs to be better theorized and documented in many English language classrooms across Asian EFL contexts, especially in terms of procurement and use of ELT materials.

The social-transformative research framework built upon some of Wright's (2010) ideas will "give as much weight to the local as to the global, while not forgetting the national [e.g., Indonesia] and regional levels in between" (Castles, 2001, p. 25) where hegemonic learning materials for TESOL are pervasively used. The rigor of some "systematic disciplinary knowledge" in TESOL and/or applied linguistics on my part will be part of the interdisciplinary approach of social transformation research suggested by Castles (p. 29). Besides, this disciplinary knowledge will facilitate a "transitional approach" to studying social transformation.<sup>ii</sup> Transitions I envision to occur will be those from dependence on "standard" monolingual English use and "mainstream" English textbooks to use of Englishes, hybrid discourses, and local, critical knowledges. Also, a part of such transitions is departure from hegemony in terms of production and use of English learning materials.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The main, but not the only, social transformative perspective in this study originates from Wright's (2010) work. His framework of "emancipatory social science" for social transformation is threefold and particularly salient here: "diagnosis and critique" (i.e., "tell[ing] us why we want to leave the world in which we live"); "formulating alternatives" (i.e., "where we want to go"); and "elaborating strategies of transformation" (i.e., "how to get from here to there") (pp. 8, 26). Wright provides a robust model explicating *social power* (i.e., through social empowerment by civil society), *state power*, and *economic* especially capitalist *power*. Wright (2010) defines the three forms of power as follows: "economic power [is] based on the control over economic resources; state power [is] based on control over rule making and rule enforcing capacity over territory; and ... social power [is] based on the capacity to mobilize people for voluntary collective actions of various sorts" (p. 113). For

social transformation to come about, Wright contends, social power committed to social justice has to be more powerful than state power and economic power, especially when these sources of power neglect or overlook social power. Social transformation is possible when social power directly controls the economic power or the social power indirectly dictates the economic power through the state power.

Wright's (2010) insights into pathways or strategies of social transformation include *ruptural*, *interstitial*, and *symbiotic* transformations. In the context of TESOL, it is too far a stretch, though, to discuss these three forms of transformation in terms of economic activities through cooperatives or labor unions against capitalistic corporations (as conceived by Wright). I will not project possible growth or deterioration of macro-scale economy as Wright does, either. That said, I do not want to fail to notice TESOL practices that do have some bearing on such economic activities as making a decision to (not) purchase English text- or coursebooks (see the Transformative Strategies section below). Realistically speaking, therefore, my Grassroots-Fighter-type<sup>iii</sup> vision of social transformation (cf. Dahle, 2007) through TESOL is more incrementally interstitial or symbiotic in nature, in the light of Wright (2010).

Ruptural transformation – "creating new institutions of social empowerment through a sharp break within existing institutions and social structures" (Wright, 2010, p. 303) – has rarely, if ever, happened in or through TESOL. Probably Benesch's (2001) finding – to be briefly addressed in the Transformative Strategies section below – is an exception. Interstitial transformation through collective actions by a civil society "seek[s] to build new forms of social empowerment in the niches and margins of capitalist society" without involving the state power – a bottom-up approach (pp. 303-304). Symbiotic transformation at first glance may appear too meek, or not radical enough, due to "mutual cooperation" between workers and capitalists<sup>iv</sup> where the former also "helps solve certain real problems faced by [the latter] and other elites" like state officials (pp. 304, 337-338). However, the workers, given that they belong to a strong labor union (e.g., that in Sweden up to the mid 1980 [p. 350]), have a robust bargaining power to be key policy makers that may even control and challenge capitalists. In this paper I will not explore class relations in a strict Marxist approach. What I will extrapolate from Wright's notion of symbiotic transformation is the relation between 1) state and economic power in a) institutionalizing English as a prestigious language to learn, as well as in b) mandating some learning materials for learning English, on the one hand, and 2) English language teachers and learners as "laborers" who have to collaborate with English and use advertised or mandated learning materials to learn the language, on the other hand.

Crucial to social transformation is how actors having some sense of agency (e.g., TESOL educators) in collective action make use of resources available in existing social structures, of which TESOL communities, language policy makers, and textbook authors/publishers are part, to challenge TESOL practices and societal perceptions that perpetuate forms of hegemony associated with English language teaching and learning. Agency has been theorized in sociology (e.g., Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992) and adapted in ELT. Kristjánsson (2013), for instance, has recently suggested a useful definition of agency along this sociological line: "a person's capacity to act within the possibilities afforded by the social structures in which he or she is situated" (p. 11). Agency is a crucial element in counter-hegemony. Schugurensky (2011) argues in view of the Freirean critical pedagogy: Where education "is an arena where hegemonic values, ideals, standards, and practices are imposed by dominant groups" through ELT materials, in particular, education is "also a place where counterhegemonic values and practices occur" (p. 204). Counterhegemony is possible when transformative agency against mere reproduction of structure is in order.

Besides agency, praxis is also an important concept. In discussing "transformative learning," Schugurensky (2002, p. 63) reiterates Freire's (1970/2000) argument that "critical reflection" (cf. Wright's [2010] notions of critique and dialogue) is not sufficient as it only leads to knowing the problems of hegemony in societal, including TESOL-related, structures. "Social action" plus critical reflection – praxis – are crucial. In particular, social actions are informed or inspired by individual as well as communal engagement in critical reflections. With forms of transformation strategies (Wright, 2010) through praxes in mind, I believe that it is possible for TESOL practitioners and English language learners (ELLs) at local grassroots, state, and transnational levels to begin addressing hegemony in TESOL-related learning materials and transcending such hegemony.

As Wright's (2010) formulation of socialist alternatives basically revolve around combinatory relations of social power, economic power, and state power, with a strong emphasis on the importance of social power over other sources of power, in the following analyses, my diagnosis and critique of each form of hegemony will be followed by strategies of transformation. In each subsection, under which transformation strategies are discussed, the role of social power through TESOL – with or without incorporating state power and/or economic power – will be made clear.

### **Diagnosis and Critique**

Regarding language use in learning materials, it is important to see how not only English, but also the type of English in academic discourse can be considered "imperialistic" (i.e., the

English "linguistic imperialism"; see Phillipson, 1992). There has been a large debate over whether Standard English academic language is functionally efficient and effective, as conventionally dictated by conventions of academic (sub)genres, or downright exclusionary/gatekeeping (Gee, 2011). It is unrealistic to eradicate standard English for academic purposes. More realistic is to equip English language learners (ELLs), especially advanced learners, to be pragmatically capable of understanding and appropriating academic language for their own purposes,<sup>v</sup> with this cautionary remark: ELLs and their teachers can still develop their own materials, based on local and alternative knowledges, which blend academic language, Englishes, and other languages as the ELLs' vernaculars. In the Transformative Strategies section below, I will discuss how hegemony in learning materials, in terms of (academic) language use and contents, can be better addressed. By "addressing" hegemony, I do not intend to eliminate English and some existing learning materials altogether; rather, they constitute a structure that allows TESOL educators, practitioners, and researchers, as well as ELLs to make use of and critique with their agency.

In terms of content, one interesting observation by Akbari (2008), in view of Gray (2001), is worth paying attention to:

[m]ost publishers advise [English-language-teaching] coursebook writers to follow a set of guidelines to make sure that controversial topics are kept out of their books. One such set of guidelines is summarized as PARSNIP... Politics, Alcohol, Religion, Sex, Narcotics, Isms, and Pornography. (p. 281)

What or whose culture is doing the hegemonic work, then? Akbari argues that textbooks not discussing explicitly issues of PARSNIP "[deal] with the needs and concerns of middle and upper classes" (p. 280) and, I should add, of 'normal' people. While it is fine for any student to have some knowledge of what concerns middle- and upper-class, as well as 'normal', people, it distorts reality of many people's lives who do not enjoy the privilege of 1) belonging to middle- and upper-class, 2) being heterosexual, 3) having able bodies, 4) having white-collar jobs that emphasize individual achievement (Gray, 2010), and 5) being celebrities (Gray, 2012), among others. Furthermore, these textbooks often depict a romantic picture of the United States and Britain (Banegas, 2011). As Tomlinson (2012) admits, in view of Gray (2010), four famous British coursebooks "celebrate personal and professional success, individualism, pleasure, mobility, ... and materialism" (p. 164). Using such textbooks further extend foreign publishers' Hayekian neoliberal, imperialist agenda that not only is

capitalistic in its profit-maximizing business (Gray, 2010), but also imparts lifestyles not reflecting people living in (absolute) poverty or other forms of marginalization.

English textbooks published locally are not necessarily better (except e.g., few ministry-approved EFL textbooks in Japan in which starvation in Sudan, among others, is included; see Hardy, as cited in Crookes, 2013, p. 38). They may be as PARNSIP-free as many of those published in English-speaking countries. Even when ELT textbooks are published in one nation-state (e.g., Indonesia), the imposition of dominant textbooks typically in one area (e.g., Java island) on another area like Papua whose students are typically considered much left behind than their other Indonesian counterparts in Java is problematic (Yembise, 2011). Tomlinson (2012) acknowledges the significance of attending to local needs, as Harwood (2010) would agree. Tomlinson (2012) even argues that, based on his experiences worldwide, "teachers and learners are more critical than they are given credit for and often resist the commodity they are being asked to consume" (p. 165). However, still interesting to explore is how teachers and learners, with or without state intervention or assistance, (can) critically resist hegemonic learning materials.

## **Transformative Strategies**

### ***On linguistic forms: Using Englishes and/or other languages***

Here I am briefly synthesizing recent literature on strategic use of Englishes that may not conform to the 'Standard' English. Literature on World Englishes, English as an International Language, or English as a Lingua Franca<sup>vi</sup> has strongly suggests that adherence only to 'Standard' English used in North America and England is no longer tenable for TESOL. Promoting strategic use of intelligible Englishes (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2012) in spoken English, especially when nonnative speakers of English are communicating to each other (i.e., in an English-as-a-Lingua-Franca context; see Canagarajah, 2007), as well as 'Standard' and 'non-standard' English (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010) in written discourse, and hybrid discourses (e.g., using mixed languages and multimodal media in whatever linguistic resources learners have at their disposal; see e.g., Stein, 2004 in an African context) for optimal meaning making is hence pivotal. Central to strategic use of Englishes, hybrid discourses, and other multimodal means of meaning making is EFL teachers' and students' raised meta-awareness of how and why they decide to use certain vocabulary words, sentence structures, or discourse organization to a certain potential audience.

To illustrate further, with their own agency (Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992) or social power (Wright, 2010), Hip-hop singers in Malaysia, have made hybridized Malay-English

songs that certainly transgress convention rules of the Standard English (Pennycook, 2007). So the issue is that the English as a structural constraint whose 'standard' is often imposed upon nonnative speakers of English by native speakers of English in de jure powerful positions (e.g., Educational Testing Service [ETS]) cannot be viewed simply as restrictive (and thus always imperialistic). Rather, monolingual 'Standard' English, which is hegemonic in standardized testing like TOEFL, can be transgressed through Englishes that serve people's own purposes apart from an imperialistic agenda of the so-called English native speakers.

In academia, using English(es), especially that which is (close to) the 'standard,' may seem like conforming to a bourgeois class, such that people who are not able to use English often belong to a 'second class,' linguistically speaking. However, using English(es) including the (nearly) standard one to critique the hegemony of English with the very tool – English – is possible. Pennycook (2001) critiques Robert Phillipson's (1992) notion of "linguistic imperialism," not so much on the grounds that the notion allows us to see how institutions like the British Council has contributed to the widespread of English as a dominant (and dominating) language across the globe, but because it is too deterministic. That is, there is too strong a view that British (or American) people have linguistically imperialized the whole world, such that people worldwide have no room to resist English use and/or, with people's agency or social power, appropriate English for an individual or a group of people's purposes. With agency through English as a lingua franca in academia, indigenous/local knowledges can reach a larger audience. Besides, once disseminated, knowledge in a certain context may resonate to other contexts. Not only in academic research, but learning materials developed by English teachers and ELLs together outside or inside of classroom contexts can potentially focus on local issues that can be connected to knowledge in other contexts.

Going back to Wright's (2010) sociological perspective, I may think of the relationship between bourgeois/capitalist power and working-class power that allows symbiotic transformations as similar to the relationship between White English native speakers in the United States, Canada, England, Australia and New Zealand who may maintain that they are *the* legitimate owners of English linguistic capital on the one hand, and nonnative speakers of English, including nonnative-English-speaking EFL teachers, who invest their 'labor' time in learning, using, teaching and attempting to possess and appropriate English linguistic capital, on the other hand. In a fatalistic condition, the latter submit themselves to the superiority of the former. In a hopeful situation the latter mutually collaborate with the former, not only to aim at mutual benefits (e.g., the expansion of TESOL and applied linguistic research agenda, or more appreciation to non-Western knowledges), but also to keep stripping off the

paradigm that English is solely, or after all, possessed by the so-called English native speakers. I do not want to reiterate this long debate on ownership of English (see e.g., Norton, 1997; Braine, 1999, to name but a very few references delving into this debate). Instead, I argue that both nonnative-English-speaking teachers and ELLs possess Englishes that allow them to create their own materials apart from, or at least in conjunction with, existing textbooks. Aside from existing materials, Matsuda and Duran (2012) have recently compiled learning activities where ELLs in traditional classrooms can explore varieties of Englishes.

However, Englishes are not the only linguistic resources. Other languages other than English may also be powerful, especially for advanced ELLs: English and at least another language (e.g., Chinese) can be used to construct arguments, especially those with scholarly tendencies. The problem is mainstream textbooks do not typically include samples of hybrid discourses. Language(s) other than English is/are not simply an object of analysis like words or expressions in transcribed spoken data for discourse analysis or error analysis of translated sentences. Hawisher, Seife, Guo, and Liu (2010), for example, wrote a chapter based on the specific notion of *guanxi* (i.e., “a set of practices based on kinship relations, family ties, connections, and experiences” [p. 58]) in a Chinese tradition. The word *guanxi* is used not only in their chapter title, but also as the backbone of their argument which is not readily available in Eurocentric or Anglo-centric discourse unless the authors elucidate it in, and interweave it with, English. From Wright's (2010) view, using English(es), potentially hybridized with other languages, to attack the hegemony of the former is part of, to appropriate Wright's (2010) concept here, symbiotic transformation. One implication for (advanced) ELLs would be that they have to find concepts like *guanxi* (preferably not merely proper names) in their languages that are concise and unique but explainable in, though not necessarily easily translated to, English.<sup>vii</sup>

### **On contents**

With regard to textbook use in schools, state involvement matters, though not necessarily in all decision-making processes. At a local (or school) level, English language teachers are the best decision makers. We cannot underestimate the agency of teachers with good conscience in deciding and implementing which strategies are appropriate for transforming hegemony in terms of contents in ELT materials.

### *Interstitial strategies*

TESOL scholars have tapped into ways of respecting local, critical, and alternative knowledges and abilities. They have been interstitially exemplary, if you will (i.e., grassroots in nature and not [necessarily] involving the state; Dahle, 2007; Wright, 2010). In implementing non-mainstream education resonant with critical pedagogy, a teacher like Cho in Shin and Crookes's (2005a) study did not depend on Western texts like those written by Gramsci, Bourdieu, Giddens, or Derrida, but used Korean texts. Furthermore, the recent Korean English Teachers' Group, under the National Teachers' Labor Union in Korea, "has been very active in organizing workshops and conferences, providing materials for English teachers" (p. 106). In another study, Shin and Crookes (2005b) convincingly show a case where South Korean ELLs can do critical pedagogy through a South Korean lens. Local themes emerged in teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions (e.g., early studying abroad, plastic surgery, public bathroom, college entrance exam, or dog-meat soup [p. 118]). A current study reported by Pessoa and Freitas (2012), though not in Asia, is also illuminative. The authors explore challenges of incorporating critical approaches to TESOL in a language center that offers language courses to university students and staff and to community members in a Brazilian big city. Students were by and large positive about the critical themes (i.e., English in the age of globalization, the power of the body, race and racism in Brazil, culture and identity, gender and sexuality [p. 761]) in English classes, but the authors hoped that in future studies selection of themes will have to be negotiated with students. In fact, students' own selections of reading materials have been attested by Fredricks (2007) where her Tajik students in Central Asia chose "Reading Lolita in Tehran" and "The Kite Runner" (an Afghan-based novel) instead of the Chinese-based "The Joy Luck Club" (p. 26).

Some other rudimentary interstitial initiatives entail thematic investigations (see Freire, 1970/2000) with my former Indonesian students in an undergraduate EFL teacher education program, as well as with high school students in a rural area (Mambu, 2009, 2010). The main purpose for these thematic investigations is social empowerment through raising awareness of sociocultural issues. In particular, by showing pictures depicting McDonalds, beauty pageant, and a beggar sitting in front of a shrine, I wanted to know how my students made sense of gloomy or ironic realities through English. When I did this with my undergraduate students as well as with the high school students, no state involvement was required, thus my attempt was an interstitial strategy of transformation. My former studies are still restricted to critical reflections, but I hope that in the long run Freirean thematic-investigation activities

will be translated into social actions, too – praxes. Also interesting is to adapt Freire's (1974/2005) insights into using "generative words." Freire was also involved in adult critical literacy activities in the State of Rio of de Janeiro, Brazil, in which he used generative words to initiate dialogues with the adults (e.g., SLUM [*favela*], FOOD [*comida*], WORK [*trabalho*], SALARY [*salario*], and WEALTH [*riqueza*], among others; see Freire, 1974/2005, pp. 76-78). Simply put, materials can be generated from ELLs' own realities and lived experiences, mediated by photographs or generative words, among others. In yet another work (Mambu, 2011) I explore how movies based on local realities such as the popular Indonesian film inspired by Andrea Hirata's *Laskar Pelangi* (Rainbow Troops) can be critically analyzed. The movie is in Bahasa Indonesia, but ELLs can make use of the English subtitles to learn English. One of inspiring statements in the movie was uttered by Pak Harfan, a poor and yet idealist elementary school teacher in Belitung: "This school is where religious and moral lessons are not merely there to complete the curriculum. The students' intelligence here is not just measured by grades or numbers, but also by their hearts" (p. 153). Although this statement may have been fictitious, the gist reflects local Indonesian (especially Muslim) idealism about quality education.

In terms of proliferating local/indigenous knowledges, it is important to explore possibilities of students' publications not necessarily in the form of academic journals or other venues where commodification of knowledges are controlled by capitalist publishing corporations. I am fortunate to know the founder of *Qarryah Thayyibah* alternative school – Mr. Bahruddin – in Kalibening, at the outskirts of Salatiga city, Central Java, Indonesia (see also Indrasafitri, 2012; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2TYzj93rNE>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ot4iu-MDAOA>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b3ybc02smA>). His students have been mostly children growing up in his neighborhood whose parents are mostly farmers who are not very rich. Inspired by Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he has revolutionized learning activities in his alternative school. Some of his former learners not only are fluent English speakers (see the second YouTube video clip I mentioned above), but also they have even published a book entitled *Lebih Asyik tanpa UAN* (It's Nicer without Final National Exams; Izza, Af'idatussofa, & Qona'ah, 2007). They wrote the book when they were around 15 years old. It will be much more fascinating, I believe, if these authors also write the book in English, with or without direct assistance from an EFL teacher educator like myself. Put another way, publishing a book like that of Izza et al. – especially in English(es), without state intervention – contribute to interstitial transformations in terms of

reshaping public's perception on national exam in light of schoolchildren's standpoint. In principle, more broadly speaking, artifacts of learning processes in a local context, like Izza et al.'s inquiry into the national exam, can be compiled, edited, and published locally to be disseminated to public, especially those interested in alternative forms of education and/or foreign language pedagogy.

Publications of non-academic texts (like short stories or poetries) in English by students or learners of non-formal education are also important in challenging "academic hegemony" that emphasizes, in Schugurensky's (2002) view, "rational discourse and rational forms of knowing" rather than "affective and emotional" (p. 60). Again, students in *Qarryah Thayyibah* have been exemplary. In his house, Mr. Bahruddin showed me his locally published students' literary works. He also attested the importance of transformative adult educators who may guide his students to write literarily in Indonesian. More literary works can be written in English by any learning communities, including *Qarryah Thayyibah*. So the issue here is not simply reading, consuming, or analyzing "canonical" literary works written in (or translated to) English by established Western (or even Asian) poets, playwrights, and novelists, but rather helping EFL learners produce their own works (or learning materials) that have literary inclination, in relatively good Englishes. To some extent, this is relevant to Tomlinson's (2012) call for more research "about approaches which help learners to develop their own learning materials" (p. 170), including those with internet support (see Crookes, 2013, pp. 40-42).

### ***Symbiotic strategies***

If the strategy of producing local knowledges through creating, or publishing (and/or distributing) local materials is still too idealistic for many EFL teachers, existing textbooks published either in a home country or abroad and used in schools or EFL teacher education programs can be objects for criticisms. These existing materials can be discussed in class with students. This is a symbiotic strategy, in view of Wright (2010), at work: using materials mandated by the state and/or promoted by publishers, the holders of economic power, and yet critiquing them. This is akin to an attempt of not throwing out the baby (e.g., themes for critical discussion generated from a textbook and useful materials for honing speaking, reading, writing, or listening skills) with the bath water (e.g., the entire textbook). Themes for critical inquiries include 1) how cultures are essentialized (e.g., Western vs. Oriental), 2) gender representations, 3) whose interests are spotlighted (e.g., upper- middle-class from or people from low socio-economic backgrounds), or 4) to what extent the textbooks

accommodate PARSNIP-related issues. Who knows after students are more aware of the limitations of currently used textbooks they would petition for more customized materials that cater for their own learning needs, or reject commercialized textbooks altogether. Or, if this is too controversial, developing a two-part syllabus is also possible: mainstream coursebooks remain to be used in one part, and in the other part teachers and students negotiate the materials covering controversial topics (e.g., gay marriage, child abuse, divorce, etc.) to be included (Banegas, 2011; see also Crookes, 2013 [chapter 2, pp. 36-37 on "adapting non-critical language materials," and pp. 38-40 on using teacher-made or locally published materials, like those in Japan, as supplements in which relevant grammatical and lexical inputs are presented with critical contents]; Osborn [2006]).

### **Advocacy**

Apart from the above symbiotic strategy of using existing and supplementary materials, there should be more inquiries into how English teachers, through unions or any other social associations, collaborate with the state to develop English learning materials customized to local needs. TESOL infrastructures (e.g., through *TESOL International Association* [www.tesol.org] or *Asia TEFL* [Teaching English as a Foreign Language] [www.asiatefl.org]) operate at a transnational level. They should ideally be international forums (cf. "global justice movement"<sup>viii</sup> in della Porta, 2007) wherein critical English language educators from various countries can muster social power that acts as pressure groups to state regulations of any nation especially in Asia. These pressure groups should problematize ELT materials which only perpetuate the status quo of solely depicting Western English-speaking values or middle- and upper-class lifestyles, even in materials written by local authors and produced by local publishers. As to how transnational pressure groups can function (interstitial/symbiotic) transformative agents, a separate article might have to be written in its own right, but a scenario can be laid out briefly.

While I find Wright's (2010) model compelling, it is rather limited to improving social power within nation-state boundaries. Transnational power of capitalism, as well as of counter-capitalism thereof, is not sufficiently addressed in Wright's work. Also absent is his attention to transnational power of English linguistic hegemony and its capitalist ramifications around the globe; and thus my extrapolation, if not also extension, of his notion of symbiotic transformation comes into play: Resisting hegemony in English language learning materials should ideally be a transnational struggle in which TESOL scholars have a stronger influence in language policy making by government officials within nation-state

boundaries. One influence is for these state officials to be monitored by a transnational organization like Asia TEFL or the like, plus a local chapter of (language) teachers' union comprising ELT educators or teacher educators committed to social justice and corruption eradication.<sup>ix</sup> As such state officials will not indiscriminately grant permission for coursebook authors and publishers to issue learning materials only representing "normality" commonly perceived by middle- or upper-class lifestyles, for instance. Together with state apparatuses dealing with educational matters, (trans)national pressure groups will also need to scrutinize processes of ELT materials production, such that government officials will not be allowed to show favoritism to certain authors or publishers (especially those who make use of bribery) to authorize certain coursebook or other materials to be imposed on state-owned and private-owned schools, colleges, and students. Aris Munandar (September 4, 2012) commented on *The Jakarta Post*: "It is not a secret that our education is the object of business for some people. This is evident from ... the procurement of unnecessary textbooks to replace the old ones." Local and transnational pressure groups can watch over procurement of unnecessary and inappropriate ELT materials in Indonesia or elsewhere. To do this, social media like Facebook (e.g., *Teacher Voices: Language Teacher Professional Development Group* [<https://www.facebook.com/groups/teachervoices/?fref=ts>] for English teachers and teacher educators worldwide, with over 6,700 members as of April 3, 2014) can be of great assistance, especially when face-to-face encounters through physical conferences or symposia may not always be possible.

#### *Toward (interstitially) ruptural strategies*

With or without assistance from transnational pressure groups, another viable approach I am suggesting here includes equipping students' skills to write a petition letter. This letter should problematize imposition of using undesirable English textbooks in a school, including those written by local authors, and be sent to a school principal, carbon-copied to official institutions like *Dinas Pendidikan* (Office of Education at a regent or municipal/city level in Indonesia), or even to the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, given that courageous EFL teachers fully support the students' letter. Some may think of this as teachers' attempt to incite students to fight against order, because usually students do not think out of the box unless they were provoked in one way or another by adults like teachers. I do not close off the likelihood that teachers do influence students to question a status quo. Simply indoctrinating grassroots-fighting spirit may be unethical, and yet not letting students know what are possible outside of conventions or traditions is to me more unethical. After all, if

students do not buy into the grassroots-fighting spirit for interstitial transformations to occur locally (recall Dahle, 2007; Wright, 2010), teachers cannot force students to challenge the status quo. Nevertheless, when students have a strong conviction in casting doubt on mainstream textbook use as the status quo after (or even before) teachers share their skepticism about textbooks available through capitalistic market distribution – especially those which neutralize issues of Politics, Alcohol, Religion, Sex, Narcotics, Isms, and Pornography (PARSNIP), among other alternative knowledges of the needy or the outcast in its broadest sense of the word – it will be a shame on teachers' part not to channel or accommodate students' voices.

Although not concerning textbook use in particular, Benesch (2001), as a tutor of English as an Academic Purposes (EAP), helped her tutees raise protests against their professors' classroom policies. Santos (1992) is wary of critical EAP teachers' imposing their political agenda on students. Benesch (2001) responds aptly that “all forms of teaching are political” (p. 66) and not questioning or problematizing professor-selected topics (e.g., the lack of female psychologists' or writers' representative view on anorexia in a professor's syllabus; see Benesch's fifth chapter) is tantamount to letting the psychology professor's imposition on his heavily paternalistic syllabus go unnoticed. The case of Benesch, a Freirean-inspired TESOL scholar, can be extrapolated to raising protests again inappropriate textbook use, given that teachers and students are brave enough to challenge the unproblematized givens (i.e., learning materials published internationally or locally that favor monolingual English and/or avoid issues of PARSNIP and forms of marginalization from being included).

## **Conclusion**

EFL (teacher) educators, researchers, and students can be social transformers who are not necessarily transforming a whole nation in strictly economic measures (as envisioned in macro scale by Wright, 2010). Through desiring a more just TESOL, they can problematize hegemony associated with a, if not *the*, dominant language of the world today—English. It is not the mastery of English, regardless of the degree of standard, that I am against, but the linguistic hegemony of 'Standard' English monolingualism that is hostile to Englishes and hybrid discourses (e.g., mixed English-Indonesian discourses) expressed multimodally (i.e., spoken, written, visual, auditory, and bodily movements). Assimilating cultures associated with English native speakers may be inevitable, and yet what I am resisting is the romanticization of 1) cultures depicting middle- or upper-class of the English-speaking world and of 2) 'normality' (e.g., heterosexuality) through English teaching materials at the expense

of other realities of the world. Also crucial is my attempt to challenge the hegemonic culture of English language teaching in which issues pertaining to socio-economic gaps, particularly between 'the haves' and 'the have-nots,' are neutralized or downright neglected.

The predominantly interstitial, grassroots-type efforts into social transformation through learning materials in TESOL discussed thus far are still only scratching surfaces of the very hegemonic forms that we intend to transform. Therefore, in transitioning from current problems to more robust, tangible forms of transformations, more follow-ups, with or without involving state power in a nation state or transnationally, should be done (e.g., helping local people publish their own local, critical, and alternative knowledges through English hybridized with one or more languages other than English; confronting market logic of commodifying knowledge through textbook use or production, with or without collaboration with state power). From cases reviewed here, teachers and learners can have options of transformative strategy for embracing and/or resisting critically hegemonic English learning materials. Finally, I concur with Wright (2010): "The best we can do... is treat the struggle to move forward on the pathways of social empowerment as an experimental process in which we continually test and retest the limits of possibility..." (p. 373) or, to use Freire's (1970/2000) phrase, the limits of "untested feasibility" (p. 102) like the likelihood that a petition letter protesting state-backed materials use is sent to a government agency. My broad brush strokes on current attempts to chart and ameliorate forms of hegemony in the production and use of English learning materials, are pathways subject to further refinement, test, and retest.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> For example, I remember teaching the *Integrated Course* for first-year undergraduate students in an EFL teacher education program in Satya Wacana Christian University, in Salatiga, in mid-2009 in which we used the glossy, and yet expensive *Touchstone 3* and *4* textbooks published by Cambridge University Press in 2006, developed by Michael McCarthy, Jeanne McCarten, and Helen Sandiford. Such use only confirms Zacharias's (2005) earlier findings. An e-textbook for Indonesian junior high school student published by the Ministry of Education in 2008 (<http://download.bse.kemdikbud.go.id/fullbook/20080724125129.pdf>) is another example which overall perpetuates some forms of legitimate/hegemonic knowledge, in my opinion.

<sup>ii</sup> I thank Prof. Daniel Schugurensky for bringing this up to my attention.

<sup>iii</sup> According to Dahle (2007), Grassroots Fighters do not believe in "solution within [an] existing order" (p. 500). I do. These Fighters also believe that change should be initiated in a bottom-up – not top-down – manner. Symbiotic transformation in Wright's (2010) view, however, allows the state (or the bourgeoisie) to be under the control of social power.

<sup>iv</sup> Wright (2010) admits that this workers-capitalists dichotomy looks too Orthodox Marxist and simplistic. However, in the present world where capitalists (e.g., owners of corporations) and employees in corporations (from high-ranking managers to low-class janitors) exist, this dichotomy is still reasonable.

<sup>v</sup> I am grateful to Prof. James Paul Gee for bringing this up to my attention in his Discourse Analysis graduate course (13 February 2013).

<sup>vi</sup> The discourses of World Englishes (WE), English as an International Language (EIL), and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) are similar, to oversimplify a bit, in terms of English varieties used outside of predominantly English-speaking countries like the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and England (i.e., the *Inner Circle* countries). Research into WE tradition develops into, among others, national-based varieties of Englishes in *Outer Circle*

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countries typically under past British colonialism (e.g., Malaysia, Singapore, and India). The ELF tradition has now paid more attention to how English is used among non-native speakers (e.g., European and Southeast Asian countries). To me, EIL encompasses WE and ELF. Recent EIL literature has been devoted to developing learning materials for nonnative speakers of English who need exposure to a variety of Englishes (see Matsuda, 2012).

<sup>vii</sup> To illustrate further, let us imagine that a Muslim ELL (in Indonesia or Saudi Arabia) wants to write her opinion on *musyrik*. She may try to define it first, and after that may use it consistently throughout her piece of writing. In *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (The Big Dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia; <http://bahasa.kemdiknas.go.id/kbbi/index.php>), *musyrik* means 1) *orang yang menyekutukan (menyerikatkan Allah)* (i.e., more or less, people who pluralize gods or make God as not the only object of worship), or 2) *orang yang memuja berhala* (i.e., heathens or pagans). In English, "heathen" means "an unconverted individual of a people that do not acknowledge the God of the Bible; a person who is neither a Jew, Christian, nor Muslim; pagan." (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/heathen>). The problem with this English translation is that Muslims may not identify themselves with Christian or Jewish beliefs in God.

<sup>viii</sup> della Porta defines it as "the loose network of organizations (with varying degrees of formality and even including political parties) and other actors engaged in collective action of various kinds, on the basis of the shared goal of advancing the cause of justice (economic, social, political, and environmental) among and between peoples across the globe" (p. 6).

<sup>ix</sup> In Indonesia, there is the Forum of Transformative Pedagogy Study. I am privileged to know some of its members, e.g., Lody Paat, Jimmy Paat, and Bambang Wisudo. These people have been very critical to the Indonesian Ministry of Education (see <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/10/23/activists-give-red-mark-education-ministry.html>). Jimmy Paat is a French-as-a-foreign-language teacher educator in the State University of Jakarta, and as his colleague I feel supported and optimistic about establishing informal forums among EFL (teacher) educators in Indonesia who potentially resist hegemonic ELT materials, both at grassroots (or interstitial) and symbiotic levels.