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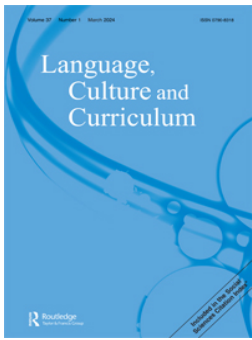
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## Poetry, ideology and heteroglossic realities in language textbooks

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## Poetry, ideology and heteroglossic realities in language textbooks

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### ABSTRACT

Using literature, more specifically poetry in English as F/L2 has grown over time. However, scholars disagree as to whether it makes any difference to language learning or what functions it serves. The purpose of this study is to examine what discourses poetry embodies, what identities it shapes, and whether it can confront dominant ideologies in English language textbooks in Pakistan. Based on Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach and Bakhtin's ideas on dialogism and heteroglossia, we analysed 12 Pakistani English language textbooks. Findings suggest poetry texts embody a variety of ideological themes, including linguistic sexism, nationalistic sentiments, and religious and spiritual ethos. These discourses tend to shape learners' identities. In addition, we also found references to poems that offer learners alternative perspectives and ways of being. In certain poems, for instance, curiosity, questioning, struggle, and recognising truth as a multifaceted entity are evident, allowing spaces for heteroglossia. Using these insights, teachers, curriculum developers and textbook writers will be able to better reflect on their pedagogical approaches and content embedded in textbooks to ensure justice, equality, and inclusion for students from a variety of socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

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## Introduction

Language scholars researching textbooks have paid a considerable attention to how school textbooks and curricula convey dominant ideologies around the world (see, for example, Curdt-Christiansen, 2017; Risager, 2018). Several ideologies have been examined, from constructing national narratives (see Repoussi & Tutiaux-Guillon, 2010) to examining gender representations (Ismael & Mohammadzadeh, 2022) and how hegemonic socio-political discourses (Shah, Pardesi, & Memon, 2023; Babaii & Sheikhi, 2018; Bori, 2018; Gray, 2010) permeate textbook spaces. Goh (2022) argues that, in general,

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textbooks can be viewed from two perspectives: 'textbooks as texts', and 'textbooks as resources'. Specifically, the 'textbooks as texts' stance illustrates how textbook discourse reflects oppression, power, ideology, or inequality by comparing or historicising national narratives or deconstructing them (see Carrier, 2018, p. 181). Conversely, the 'textbook as resource' perspective shows how textbooks can be used and modified in the classroom to facilitate learning.

In line with this, Canale (2021) discusses textbook research as having three dimensions: *representation*, *interaction*, and *learning* while further adding that most of the studies have examined representations of discourses related to culture, politics, and ideologies. Further, these studies emphasise textbooks as content carriers, without recognising that they are also 'socially alive' artefacts (Knappett, 2002) with the potential to engender competing discourses and create spaces for resistance (Shah et al., 2023). According to Prior (2012), documents can be considered both as containers as well as actors. In the backdrop of this argument, our study contends that an extant academic scholarship on representational aspect of textbooks has largely focused on prosaic texts and language activities with a little critical attention given to poetry. As poetry is an integral part of school language curricula, it also requires a careful attention in terms of what interests it serves and what discourses it embodies in language classes. This study is an extension of the first authors' argument elsewhere that considers 'prose' in Pakistani English textbooks as having both ideological and agentive aspects (Shah et al., 2023) as opposed to previous studies that perceive language textbooks as mere ideological and discursive entities (see e.g. Channa et al., 2017; Mahboob, 2017; Qazi, 2023). We analyse poetry in Pakistani English textbooks published by Sindh textbook board (STB) – a government organisation responsible for creating and disseminating textbooks for schools and colleges in Sindh province of Pakistan.

Adding to the textbook as 'text' stance, we take language textbook as a dialogic text/discourse comprising of opposing meanings: monoglossic and heteroglossic realities, where the former in the present study is explained in terms of 'ideology' as discussed by Norman Fairclough. As he defines ideology as representation of aspects of the world, which is used for establishing, maintaining, and changing social relations of power, domination, and exploitation (Fairclough, 2003, p. 9). Further, it is maintained that the power uses ideology to win the consent of people. As such, our study builds on Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) that combines Fairclough's (2003) dialectical-relational approach (DRA) with Bakhtin's works on *dialogism* and *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin, 1981; 1984) in order to gain a better understanding of how poetry functions in Pakistani school English textbooks. Fairclough (2003, pp. 40–41) indicates three primary themes in social research (1) *social difference*, which is related to the salience of particular social identities, (2) *the universal and the particular*, meaning how particular identities, interests, and representations become universal under certain conditions and (c) ideology, highlighting the importance of the assumptions in texts in terms of ideology. In Bakhtin's view, discourse is inherently dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 289). The meaning of a speech or text arises from its relationships with several opposing meanings in a social context. As such, texts are heteroglossic in the sense that they acknowledge a number of diverging and convergent socio-semiotic realities. Notably, Bakhtin's ideas have been used and developed as an analytic method for studying (literary) discourse in language and education (e.g. see Skaftun, 2019 on dialogic discourse analysis (DDA)). Using this dialogic view of discourse, we argue

that dialogic character of poetry offers spaces to learners to negotiate their diverse identities and voices in language classes that are ideologically repressive. The study anchors the following research questions:

1. What ideological representations does poetry in Pakistani school English textbooks embody?
2. In what way does the poetry taught in Pakistani English classes provide spaces for alternative realities and voices in language classes?

We begin by briefly outlining critical discourse studies (CDS) as a field and how poetry is incorporated into CDS, and language education followed by a discussion of the context, methodology, data and analytical procedure. Lastly, we discuss our findings and make recommendations for future research as well as highlighting the implications of the study.

### Critical discourse studies (CDS), poetry and language education

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), more broadly referred to as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) for embracing numerous theoretical and analytical models, was established in Europe in the 1980s by researchers, such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun van Dijk. CDS examines language use and other semiotic modalities in relation to dominance, power, and control (Wodak, 1995). According to Fairclough (1992) discourse can be understood as a text, a discursive practice, and a social practice. As a text, discourse deals with the micro elements such as how language e.g. grammar, vocabulary, cohesion and text structure come into play in any written or spoken text as well as in images, whereas discourse as a discursive practice examines how the text is produced, circulated, and received in society. Lastly, as a social practice, it connects with the themes like ideology, power, inequalities, and/or injustices. Further, Fairclough (2015, p. 135) distinguishes discourse as an ‘abstract’ and ‘count’ noun. As an abstract noun, discourse refers to language in use, while as a count noun, it refers to ways of signifying experience from a particular perspective. This distinction of discourse by Fairclough can also be seen in Gee’s (2015) works with a distinction of small ‘d’ discourses from big ‘D’ discourses. According to Gee (2015, p. 106), big D discourses are social ways (i.e. ideologies and assumptions) to enact and recognise socially meaningful identities.

In our study, we analyse poetry texts as big D discourses in addition to the dialogic potential embodied in poetry in order to understand what ideologies and assumptions it carries in language textbooks. A number of studies have used CDA to examine poetry (e.g. Alipurgaskeri & Eldaghi, 2022; Khan, 2015; Ntombela, 2016). Recently, Motinyane (2023) examined poems of Maphalla – a South African poet using CDA, exploring freedom, peace, justice, inequality, and injustice. For our study, however, we use CDS to examine school language textbooks that we assume as carrying dominant ideologies as well as creating spaces for identity negotiation and resistance. As we approach the term ‘discourse’ within a transdisciplinary framework (Fairclough, 2010) meaning that it can draw from linguistics and other theories from social sciences, we therefore combine Fairclough’s approach to CDA with Bakhtin’s writings on dialogism and heteroglossia (see also, Skaftun, 2019 on dialogic discourse analysis). The ideas of Bakhtin on literature and language have been particularly helpful for studying literature and its social and

political relevance. However, Bakhtin's literary interests are largely focused on the novel, and his theories are rarely applied to poetry. As Bakhtin dismissed poetry as monoglossic and authoritarian. Nevertheless, some researchers maintain that Bakhtin's own comments about poetry indicate he is more critical of formalist readings of poetry than of poetry itself (see Booker, 1990, p. 72). Scholars argue that if every word is born from dialogue, that is, if every word is internally and externally dialogic, then how can there be utterances that are not dialogic. As every utterance is, in Bakhtin's words, 'essentially dialogical', poetry is also dialogical: it just pretends otherwise (Hirschkop, 1989). A shift towards poetic dialogism is evident in modern poetry itself (Booker, 1990, p. 73).

In language education, a number of scholars have discussed the role of literature in general and poetry in particular. According to Kramsch and Kramsch (2000), literature, for instance, has played numerous roles in language teaching, such as promoting aesthetics, literacy education, moral and vocational uplift, ideology, humanistic inspiration, and authentic cultural experiences. Others have also stressed the positive effects of literature in language instruction (Carter, 2007; Hanauer, 2001; Paran, 2008). However, scholars such as Edmondson (1997) believe literature has no special role to play in foreign language learning. He argues that literature does not activate cognitive mechanisms differently from other texts. In contrast, Paran (2008, p. 469) points out that language learning encompasses more than just language. Using literary texts in a foreign language classroom not only helps students learn the language, but also makes learning more meaningful (Bredella, 2000a, p. 380). As to the teaching of poetry in English language classes, it is argued that the emotional content of poetry elicits interest and motivation (Hess, 2003), meaning that if poetry is taught with innovative methods, it will increase the learning of languages and result in more constructive outcomes (Pushpa & Savaedi, 2014). Our analysis of poetry focuses largely on representations, and what spaces for identity negotiation and diverse voices are accessible through discourses involving poetry rather than whether it facilitates learning of English as L2 or foreign language.

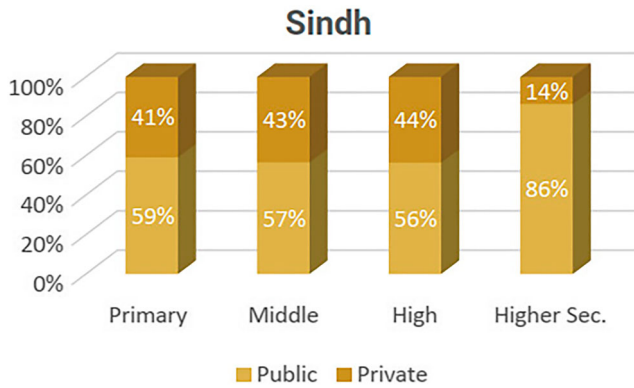
## The present study

### Context and the data

Formal education in Pakistan is divided into three categories: schools (Pre-primary – Class 12), colleges (degree colleges, Classes 13–16), and universities (bachelors, masters, PhD). In our study, we focus on school education (1–12). Schools in Pakistan differ statistically nationwide in terms of public-private split at all levels: primary, middle, high, and higher secondary (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Nationwide statistics of public-private schools in Pakistan (Source: Pakistan Education Statistics, 2020–2021, pp. 9–13).

| Type of School                         | Public Sector |            | Private Sector |            |
|--|---------------|------------|----------------|------------|
|  | Frequency     | Percentage | Frequency      | Percentage |
| Primary Schools (grade 1–5)            | 126,519       | 87         | 18,458         | 13         |
| Middle Schools (grade 6–8)             | 16,216        | 34         | 30,966         | 66         |
| High Schools (grade 9–10)              | 14,900        | 44         | 19,310         | 56         |
| Higher Secondary schools (grade 11–12) | 2844          | 40         | 4266           | 60         |



**Figure 1.** Public-private ratio in schools of Sindh province, Pakistan (Source: Pakistan Education Statistics, 2020–2021, p. 27).

However, Sindh, the country's second-largest province, which is the context of our study, has a greater number of public schools managed by the government than those run privately (see Figure 1). The English textbooks as being examined in our study are taught in public schools throughout the whole province, as well as in non-elite private schools (grades 9–12), except for elite private schools that follow the UK-based Cambridge system with its own textbooks published in the United Kingdom or the United States by Oxford or Cambridge University Press (Shah et al., 2023). The textbooks in our study are locally produced by Sindh Textbook Board (STB) in Jamshoro, a government agency working under the directives of the Education and Literacy Department of the Sindh government, Pakistan (see Table 2).

Each textbook contains several units on prose, poetry, grammar, activities, and language skills. On average, each textbook contains 3–4 poetry texts. The first author has analysed prose and language activities elsewhere (see Shah, 2023). The focus of this study was on units related to poetry. These textbooks are based on the national curriculum that emphasises four competencies in English curriculum that students should develop. These include oral (1) communication skills, (2) reading and critical thinking, (3) vocabulary and grammar, and (4) writing (e.g. SNC, 2022, p. 4).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the recent national curriculum in Pakistan explains what type of texts can be incorporated

**Table 2.** Textbooks used in the Study.

| Textbook                        | Publication year |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| My English Book 1               | 2013             |
| My English Book 2               | 2013             |
| My English Book 3               | 2013             |
| My English Book 4               | 2013             |
| My English Book 5               | 2013             |
| My English Book 6               | 2013             |
| My English Book 7               | 2013             |
| My English Book 8               | 2013             |
| Secondary Stage English Book I  | 2021             |
| Secondary Stage English Book II | 2021             |
| Comprehensive English Book 1    | 2022             |
| Intermediate English Book II    | 2021             |

into improving students' reading skills. Among these are narrative, expressive, and reflective (literary texts) aimed at developing students' literary, creative, and aesthetic sense. Specifically, the curriculum emphasises stories, novels, poems (lyrics, ballads, sonnets), play scripts, biographies, anecdotes, diary entries, science fiction, and fantasies as text types to be taught to the learners (see SNC, 2022, p. 100). As part of the analysis, we first gathered our data on poetry and separated it into two groups considering our study objectives that examine ideological meanings in poems and heteroglossic realities. In the latter case, we found that some poems contain an agentive dimension that tend to counter the ideological discourses by offering alternative realities in addition to the other content that pertained to nature, environment, traffic education, children entertainment, etc. and that we included in heteroglossic content (see Table 3). In our analysis, nonetheless, we have presented the findings related to the ideology and agency as two opposing and conflictual forces embedded in poetry texts to achieve our study objectives.

Poetry with ideological meaning has a tendency of promoting and sustaining an authoritarian voice. Several poems in the textbooks express religious and moral values, patriotic sentiments, and other topics that contribute to building a grand narrative about what it means to be a Pakistani. Whereas the poems with agentive nature offer alternative ways of thinking and being. These poems shed light on how confrontation and resistance are possible in language classes using textbook discourses. Considering the space available in the article, the data presented in this article is representative of overall data related to both the ideological meanings of the poems as well as their contribution to alternative discourses and ways of being. The analysis is based on an abductive approach, which makes a parallel use of both theory and data for analysis.

### Analytical framework

For the analysis of ideological meanings in the data, the study draws from Fairclough's writings on CDA (see Fairclough, 2003, 2015). The rationale behind choosing Fairclough's model lies in the fact that he provides theoretical and analytical categories for the analysis of language and how it connects with the broader social structures, power, and ideologies. According to him, CDA exposes the ideology of power that has become naturalised in society and has led to unequal power relations. His CDA writings examine discourse and

**Table 3.** Classification of poems in terms of ideology and heteroglossic content.

| Textbook                       | Total poetry units (f) | ideological content (f) | Heteroglossic content |           |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
|                                |                        |                         | Agentive content (f)  | Other (f) |
| My English Book 1              | 2                      | 1                       | 0                     | 1         |
| My English Book 2              | 3                      | 0                       | 0                     | 3         |
| My English Book 3              | 5                      | 0                       | 0                     | 5         |
| My English Book 4              | 3                      | 0                       | 0                     | 3         |
| My English Book 5              | 4                      | 1                       | 0                     | 3         |
| My English Book 6              | 1                      | 0                       | 1                     | 0         |
| My English Book 7              | 2                      | 0                       | 1                     | 1         |
| My English Book 8              | 2                      | 1                       | 0                     | 1         |
| Secondary Stage English book 1 | 6                      | 3                       | 1                     | 2         |
| Secondary Stage English book 2 | 6                      | 1                       | 4                     | 1         |
| Comprehensive English book 1   | 8                      | 2                       | 2                     | 4         |
| Intermediate English book 2    | 11                     | 5                       | 4                     | 2         |
| Total                          | 53                     | 14                      | 13                    | 26        |



society as dialectically interconnected. Accordingly, he presents a theoretical and analytical framework that examines discourse not in terms of words and sentences, but rather genres, discourses, and styles (Fairclough, 2003, p. 25). This implies that specific modes of acting (genres, such as poetry in our study) embody dominant representations (i.e. discourses) and contribute to the formation of specific identities (i.e. styles). In this view, we take poetry as a literary genre in our analysis as included in language textbooks and examine what discourses does it embody and what identities it constitutes. Accordingly, we selected poetry texts with ideological overtones and examined these texts at three levels: description, interpretation and explanation (see Fairclough, 2003, 2015). As a first step, we carried out the linguistic analysis focusing on the words, sentences, metaphors, and textual structures involving the text and images to uncover their ideological and discursive effects. The second step involves examining pragmatic meanings, commonsense assumptions, and background knowledge related to language and discourse embedded in poetry. This led to the use of analytical categories such as presupposition, script, topic, and framing. Lastly, we explained these meanings in the context of broader socio-cultural realities, ideologies, and power dynamics in Pakistan.

In addition to analysing ideology in poetry in school language textbooks, we also contribute to the identifying alternative voices in poetry as dialogic discourse. To this end, we also considered Bakhtin's writings that helped us read discourses of poetry in terms of dialogue and heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1984). This suggests the potential of poetry and language textbooks to encapsulate the contrasting views as opposed to the single-voiced reality in the interest of building a specific grand narrative about Pakistan as discussed in the former case. Bakhtin argues, the nature of human life itself is a dialogue in a way that a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). The dialogue that people engage in consequently leads to a competition of voices. Dialogism allows for arguments since every viewpoint is represented in dialogue rather than just the universal truth (Nesari, 2015). Furthermore, the term heteroglossia refers to the role language plays in exposing people to a variety of social situations and world-views (Bakhtin, 1981). Consequently, every meaning in a text is associated with a social situation with a variety of opposing meanings, and this text derives its social meaning from the degree of opposition to those alternative meanings. In accordance with this, we identified some poems in our data with opposing or alternative meanings in contrast to the dominant voices embedded in poems as discussed. Using dialogue and heteroglossia as analytical categories, we approached these poems and explained how they offer different ways of being and belonging in the face of the dominant reality that is emphasised in some poems as found in the case of the present study. In the following sections, we present detailed findings on how poetry can manifest both ideology and heteroglossic realities.

## Findings and discussion

In this section, we present findings of our study by examining poetry texts. For this purpose, our analysis is separated into subsections that focus on ideological dimension of poetry and how it creates spaces for resistance, alternative realities and identity negotiation.

### Poetry as an ideological literary genre: politics of building narratives

Poetry is often interpreted in terms of its emotional effects and how it contributes to learning a foreign or second language (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000; Paran, 2008). This section, however, explains poetry and the way it plays its role in building identity narratives when integrated in school curricula. For instance, we were able to trace out certain identity narratives, including linguistic sexism and gendered identity, nationalistic sentiments and religious and spiritual values in poetry as embedded in English language textbooks under scrutiny. Excerpt 1 shows how use of language in poetry text contributes to the linguistic sexism (Figure 2).

#### Excerpt 1

A short poem in excerpt 1 emphasises the value of waking up early in the morning for a variety of reasons, including maintaining good health, gaining wisdom, and getting rich. This discourse appears to be very positive. Yet the phrase ‘makes a man’ is problematic since ‘man’ is used generically in the sentence and presupposed to stand for both genders. Conversely, it reproduces the ideology of linguistic sexism. Fairclough (2003, p. 92) notes that some words reflect what is going on in society at large and are ideologically contested. In this grade 1 poetry text, ‘man’ reinforces the patriarchal normative order of Pakistani society as promoted in language textbooks (Agha et al., 2018; Ullah & Skelton, 2013). Such linguistic constructions normalise specific ways of doing, being, and thinking in society through reinforcement of language use. As a discursive practice,



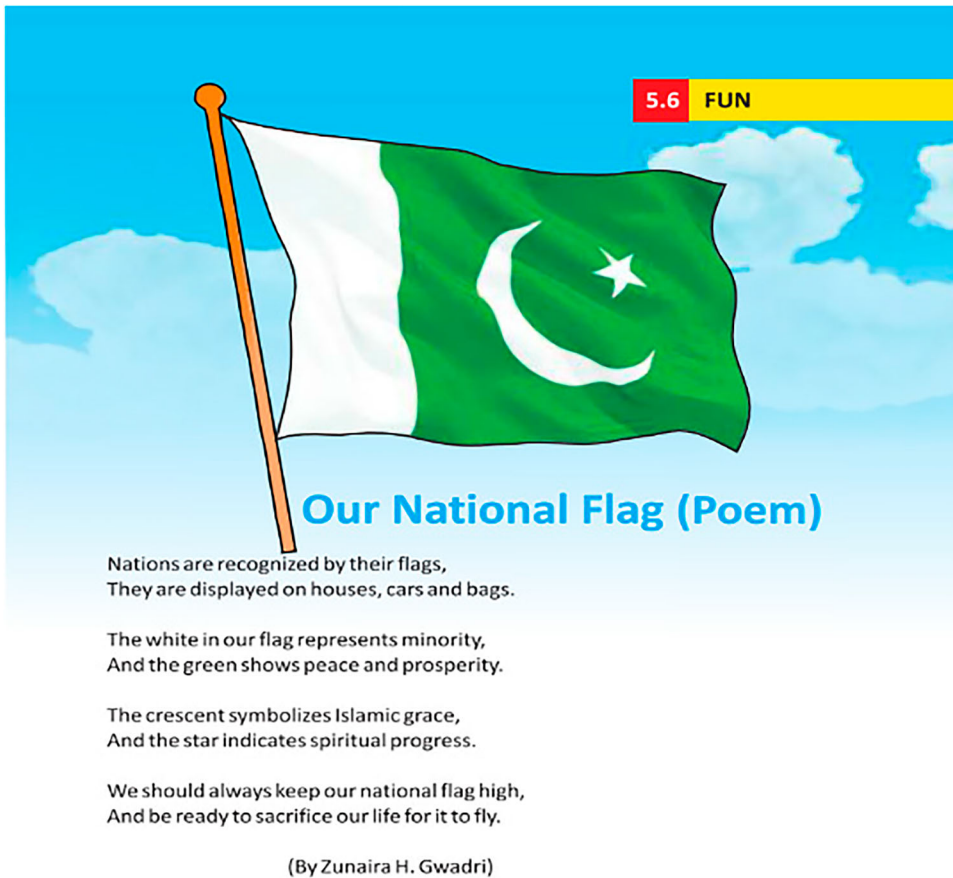
Figure 2. Linguistic sexism (Source: grade 1, p. 65).

**Table 4.** Poems and their authorship in terms of gender.

|  | Frequency (f) |
|--|---------------|
| Number of poems written by male writers      | 31            |
| Number of poems written by female writers    | 4             |
| Number of poems written by anonymous writers | 18            |
| Total number of poems in English textbooks   | 53            |

the textbook rationalises specific gendered identities by selecting such discourses, which learners, in their early learning stages, rarely question or critique. Even teachers seem to conform to the traditional gender roles in language classes (Agha & Shaikh, 2023). Another interesting aspect that we find in our study in relation to the gender is about whether gender representation is fairly distributed in terms of authorship (see Table 4). This reflects broadly how gender is treated in poetry.

Including more male poets indicates how textbooks lack a gender-just orientation quantitatively in teaching poetry to English language learners in Pakistan. This calls for quantitative justice for fair and equal representation of male and female poets/authors in textbooks. In a similar way, the excerpt 2 illustrates how poetry texts are used to construct learners' nationalistic identities (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Religious and patriotic 'voice' (grade 5, p. 96).

### Excerpt 2

The excerpt 2, which also combines the image of the Pakistani flag, seems to construct nationalistic identities for language learners. In the poem, such nationalistic identity is linked to religion, e.g. Islam, which serves as a strong ideological force in the collective social fabric of the country. According to Fairclough (2015), texts have causal effects, and one of these effects is the reshaping of identities based on ideological principles. Text as a social practice can be argued to understand how such poems as found in our study contribute to sustaining particular ideologies. Apart from semiotic representation of a 'flag' an identity signifier, a linguistic expression, such as '*and be ready to sacrifice our life for it to fly*', with the modal auxiliary '*should*' and the adverb '*always*', illustrates a metaphorical need to live at any cost for one's country. The presence of such discourses that emphasise radical nationalistic discourses and identities has also been demonstrated in prosaic content in several textbooks in Pakistan (Aziz, 2010; Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Shah et al., 2023; Qazi, 2023) and globally (see Canale, 2021 for a comprehensive overview).

These scholars have contested, overemphasised, and overrated identities in textbooks and language use that limit learners' thinking to local contexts without findings a support for a broad understanding of global issues (Mahboob, 2009; 2017). In addition, studies suggest more vibrant frameworks for language and culture pedagogy that consider transnational flows of people, commodities, and ideas. Generally, transnational studies view the world in terms of processes and practices that cross national boundaries, while intercultural learning is defined as the development of a better understanding of the interdependence of all regions of the Earth (complex and conflictual) (see Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Risager, 2007). In contrast, the poetry texts used in the current study, from this perspective, expose learners to the concept of nations as separate entities and prepare them to love their country, while creating hostile attitudes toward other nations, as can be seen in the literature on Pakistani textbooks (Rahman, 2002; Rosser, 2003). In addition, the following excerpts 3, 4 and 5 as combined together due to the common theme of religion provide further insights into how specific ideological positions are shaped through poetry:

### Excerpt 3

My longing comes to my lips as **supplication** of mine  
**O God!** May like the candle be the life of mine!  
 May the world's darkness disappear through the life of mine!  
 May every place light up with the sparkling light of mine!  
 ... **O God!** Protect me from the evil ways.  
 Show me the path leading to the good ways.  
 Source: Secondary Stage English book 1 (grade 9, p. 95)

### Excerpt 4

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase)  
 Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
 Making it rich, and a like a lily in the bloom,  
 An **angel** writing in a book of gold.  
 The angel wrote and vanished. The next night

It came again with a great wakening light,  
 And showed the names whom **love of God** had blessed,  
 And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest!  
 Source: Secondary Stage English book 1 (grade 9, p. 174)

### Excerpt 5

Who **God** doth late and early pray  
 More of **His grace** than gifts to lend:  
 And entertains the harmless day.  
 With a **religious book** or friend  
 Source: Comprehensive English book 1 (grade 11, p. 187)

Religion and spirituality are recurring themes in excerpts 3, 4, and 5. For instance, excerpt 3 is a poem '*lab pe ati he*' originally written in Urdu by Allama Muhammad Iqbal – the Muslim poet and philosopher from the pre-partition period in the subcontinent. The poem is translated into English in a grade 9 English textbook as 'A Child's Invocation' and serves as a literary genre to impart ideological meanings to students. As such, learners' religious identities are foregrounded through religious discourse. Fairclough (2015) notes that genres, discourses, and styles are dialectically linked. Thus, such genres e.g. poetry in school English textbooks constrain learners' ways of doing, being, and thinking. The textbooks in Pakistan are shaped by and constitutive of dominant discourses found in society at large. In a similar manner, excerpts 4 and 5 emphasise religious ideology through ideological overwording (Fairclough, 2003, 2015) embedded in the selected excerpts. In excerpt 4, there is a story about a pious man named *Abu Ben Adhem*, who witnesses an angel in his room around midnight and engages in a dialogue with the angel about love of God. Their discussion reveals that God loves those who care about humanity. By virtue of literary genres linked with religious ideologies, this act of caring for and loving humanity is de-secularised. Such an overemphasis on religious ideology can be traced in a number of studies on language textbooks (Mahboob, 2009; Shah et al., 2023; Qazi, 2023).

Likewise, excerpt 5 is taken from a poem '*Character of a Happy Life*' written by Henry Wotton – an English poet mentions in the last lines of the poem that a happy life can be seen as being characterised by worshiping God and seeking His grace followed by spending time with a religious book or a friend. As a text, this discourse reinforces religiously oriented language e.g. God, grace, religious book/friend, as shown in excerpt 5, which can influence learners' conceptual framing of the world. Considering that discourse is shaped by societal power relations and contributes to institutional and societal struggles, Fairclough (2015) recommends investigating it at three levels of social organisation: the societal level, the institutional level, and the situational level. We can therefore argue that religion is a widely recognised and disseminated force in Pakistan penetrating the country's educational spaces and language materials. In Pakistan, this can be traced to the military ruler Zia-ul-Haq who launched a nationwide Islamisation project in the 1980s that radically transformed society in terms of religion. As a result, religion has assumed a significant position in language education, policies, and practices in the country and operates as a key ideological apparatus affecting textbook content (Qazi, 2023; Siddiqui, 2016). This view is argued from a critical discourse perspective, where such representations are normalised as rational, acceptable, and desirable methods of doing things. However, as shown in the following section, we show how poetry tends to create alternative realities and resist dominant meanings.

### *Poetry as a literary genre for articulating heteroglossic realities: alternative voices and resistance*

Findings of the study indicate that out of 53 poems that were found in 12 English language textbooks (grade 1–12), 13 poems were identified that embody alternative voices and show resistance to the dominant meanings. These poems appear to be counterhegemonic in a sense that they offer ways for learners to negotiate their diverse identities and worldviews in language classes. The discourse of the poems with the language embedded in it demonstrates how poetry can engage learners in a meaning-making process through several linguistic devices, including metaphor and allegory. The dialogic character of poetic discourse seems to be an oppositional voice, in contrast to poems and other prose texts which reproduce and sustain institutionalised discourses (Channa et al., 2017; Mahboob, 2015; Shah et al., 2023). The following two extracts taken from the poems ‘*try again*’ written by W. Hickson and ‘*the man who wins*’ written by an anonymous writer explain how these poems encourage readers (language learners in this case) to continue their struggle in life against all odds.

#### *Excerpt 6*

Tis a lesson you should heed,  
Try again;  
If at first you don’t succeed,  
Try again.  
Then your courage should appear,  
For if you will preserve,  
You will conquer, never fear,  
Try again.  
(Source: My English Book, grade 6, p. 45)

#### *Excerpt 7*

If you think you are beaten, you are.  
If you think you dare not, you don’t.  
If you like to win, but think you can’t,  
It is almost certain you won’t.  
Life’s battles don’t always go  
To the stronger or faster man,  
But soon or late the man who wins  
Is the man WHO thinks HE CAN!  
(Source: Secondary Stage English Book II, grade 10, p. 65)

A constant struggle in life is emphasised in excerpt 6. According to Bakhtin (1981), the meaning of text emerges from social interaction and that conflicting voices co-occur in all kinds of social contexts. Accordingly, this excerpt and the whole poem represents the struggle for change and the need to overcome fears in order to succeed. In English language classes, such poems can offer multi-voicedness when contextualised and understood in relation to a particular geo-political setting, like Pakistan. In Pakistan, for example, there are several types of ongoing struggles, such as class conflicts, racial tensions, and discrimination based on language, status, and religion. Skaftun (2019) notes that within

the discursive world, we find a struggle between dialogic and monologic forces. The poems and prose in English textbooks expose learners to the ideological world, while also providing them with spaces where they can escape ideology and reflect on their struggles, transformations, and alternative realities. Thus, excerpts 6 and 7 describe a human condition that requires courage, boldness, and struggle. In this way, these excerpts embody a voice for students who bring various socio-ideological discourses to class and can be triggered by such dialogic tendencies to either conform or counter them.

Language used in excerpt 7, such as 'life's battles don't always go to the stronger', gives the impression that struggle will likely lead to success, even against authoritarian voices. In Bakhtin's view, language is more than just a tool for understanding the self. It is also a prerequisite for consciousness. As Bakhtin (1984, p. 59) pointed out, human beings, their struggle for voice, and their capacity for growth and creativity are tied together. In his view, the human being is an unfinished being who has yet to say the ultimate word. The Bakhtinian subject thus uses the language and discourse of the Other and appropriate them accordingly. Learners may interpret 'struggle' differently depending on their context in the above excerpt. Similarly, the metaphor of 'battle' represents different realities in which learners are situated. According to Booker (1990, p. 79), since the world is constantly changing, and reality can only be accessed indirectly and metaphorically; we know little, but also only metaphors of it. Because of this, there is no authoritative language to represent reality. Language as used in the poem offers an open space to learners to think about their different kind of struggles based in their local contexts. There are two other poems, '*Don't Quit*' from grade 11 and '*Say not struggle not availeth*' from grade 12, which also reflect a similar viewpoint, as shown in the following excerpts:

### Excerpt 8

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low and debts are high,  
And you want to smile but have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.  
(Source: Comprehensive English Book 1, grade 11, p. 192)

### Excerpt 9

Say not the struggle naught availeth,  
The labor and the wounds are vain,  
The enemy faiths not, not faileth,  
And as things have been they remain.  
(Source: Intermediate English Book II, grade 12, p. 65)

The excerpts 8 and 9 illustrate a social discourse that tends to promote courage, offers insights to overcome pessimism, and teaches not to give up. A metaphor such as '*roads seeming uphill*' or '*low funds* and '*high debts*' yet continuing smooth struggles is an example of how poetic utterances provoke a response in the Other, such as learners (Vitanova, 2010) when they are exposed to such poetic utterances. According to Bakhtin (1986, p. 88),



any word exists for the speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word in language, belonging to nobody; as an other's word, which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance; and finally, as my word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression.

In this view, it can be argued that language in excerpts 8 and 9 such as 'labor', 'wounds', 'enemies', 'struggle', 'debt', etc., are already articulated words charged with some meanings assigned by their interlocutors and have been already used in different social contexts. In Bakhtin's view, words that we use have been used before, and hence they have meanings ascribed to them by others (Skaftun, 2019).

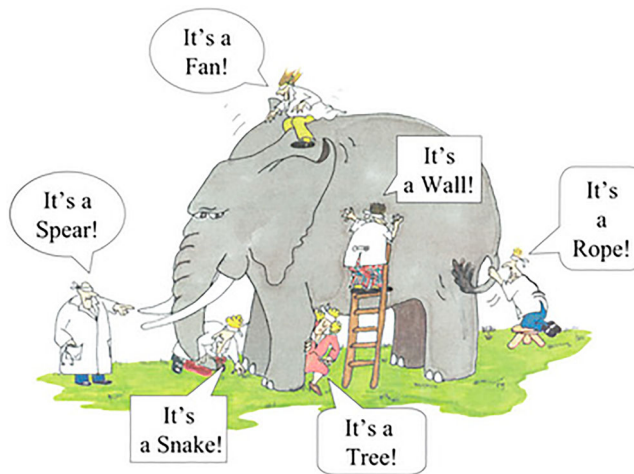
The words expressed in poems as such reflect poets' own struggles with various socio-ideological discourses that English language learners can appropriate while learning poetry in Pakistan English classes. These excerpts may allow learners to counter and challenge grand identity narratives that exclude, silence, or erase their indigenous local identities. Different learners may interpret these poetic utterances differently based on their local contexts and socio-cultural ecologies. Marková (1992) reminds us that individuals are not powerless and at the mercy of the outside world. In fact, they exert agency that is influenced and affected by other people's voices and actions. Consequently, these excerpts are likely to give students their own voice in creating new paths as a result of their interaction with such poetic utterances and the use of language as discourse. Sullivan and McCarthy (2004) point out that individuals are free to determine how they value events, others, and ideological discourses, thus bringing questions of ethics, morality, and power into their subjective experiences. As teacher-scholars, we believe such openness in the text can resist authoritarianism as reflected in biased consciousness and docility in textbooks (Aziz, 2010; Channa et al., 2017). One example of countering authority can be seen in the poem '*the blind men and the elephant*' from grade 10, which illustrates how reality can be plural, e.g. relativisation of monologisms in Bakhtinian sense (Figure 4).

### Excerpt 10

It was six men of Indostan,  
 To learning much inclined,  
 Who went to see the elephant  
 (Through all of them were blind),  
 That each by observation  
 Might satisfy his mind.  
 And so, these men of Indostan  
 Disputed loud and long,  
 Each in his own opinion  
 Exceeding stiff and strong,  
 Though each was partly in the right  
 And all were in the wrong!  
 (Source: Secondary Stage English Book II, Grade 10, p. 185)

J. G Saxe was an American poet known for retelling Indian fables to western audience. A multi-voiced/heteroglossic nature of the fable in poetic form is illustrated in excerpt 10. This fable is found in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain writings, illustrating the multiple ways in which truth can be expressed. Partial truths (socio-ideological discourses or





**Figure 4.** The Blind men and the Elephant (image also included in the textbook, grade 10, p. 184) Source: J. Himmelfarb (artist G. Renee Guzlas).

monologisms) are held as subjective experiences that can be brought into dialogue with other voices/truths to create a whole picture. A poem describes six blind men who wish to see an elephant. They determine the identity of the elephant by touching each part of it individually. This resembled an elephant with the wall, spear, snake, tree, and rope. As part of their subjective experience, they disputed what they perceived/felt. Allegorically, the poem questions how we adhere to our own subjective experiences in the social world while ignoring the viewpoints and voices of others. The poem is best explained by Bakhtin's account of the interaction between centripetal and centrifugal forces (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 27), which indicates that the openness of the world as a dialogue is at odds with cultural and ideological forces that seek to gain control and exert monologic authority in a messy world. In the world of discursive relations, blind people are seen as monologic authorities with their own assessments of truth as a result of exerting centripetal force. However, it shows how these discourses co-occur as yet incomplete viewpoints with opposing meanings. Instead of simply following or adhering to the hegemonic worldview, this poem enables learners to embrace different viewpoints and always be able to negotiate different worldviews. A poem with a similar tendency as shown in excerpt 11 can be seen in grade 12 with some monoglossic overtones (religious worldview) embedded in it:

### Excerpt 11

What has happened now?  
 Who am I?  
 An insignificant atom  
 In a chaotic cosmos  
 Someone has drugged my Soul  
 Another has stolen my Light  
 No long I am the same I was.  
 I am another man  
 Of the race of the damned;  
 I am the dead man

And I wander in visionary worlds  
In search of the Primeval Spark  
That lent Light  
To the Star that I have lost.  
(Source: Intermediate English Book II, Grade 12, p. 70)

In excerpt 11, the poet criticises the materialistic tendencies that have detached the modern human from the spiritual and mystical realities that have dominated the East for centuries. G. Allana was a poet, historian, and diplomat who took part in the partition movement that led to the creation of Pakistan. In the above excerpt, G. Allana uses the metaphor of the 'star' to describe humanity as created by God who has lost its identity through material advancements. Within a dialogic relationship, poetic utterances raise questions such as, 'who am I?', which can be referred to Bakhtin's notion of appropriation of discourses that learners can draw on to negotiate alternative voices. In language classes, such questions can be appropriated by learners to rethink their own realities, not necessarily adhering to the poem's religious ideology. As Dufva and Aro (2015, p. 41) explain, with the past learning trajectories, learners also have ideal 'selves': who and where they aim to. This dialogic tendency in the poem provides a space for alternative voices to emerge in the classroom, as learners can benefit from these utterances to negotiate their own racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities to create space for inclusive education and language learning as these students from diverse backgrounds remain largely underrepresented in language textbooks (see e.g. Shah et al., 2023). 'Wandering in visionary worlds' as described in the poetic utterance in excerpt 6 can lead learners to imagine their own world – the one they live in and the one they want to. According to Bakhtin (1981, p. 332), such ideological discourses and metaphorical language, such as the star, the primaevaal spark, the race of the damned, and the lost star, contribute to our dialogical and heteroglossic understanding of reality.

### Concluding remarks

In this study, we examined poetry as a literary genre in English language textbooks in Pakistan to understand what discourses it embodies, what identities it tends to constitute, and whether it offers a space for resistance, alternative ways of thinking and being, and negotiating identity. This study combined Fairclough's view of discourse as text, discursive practice, and social practice with Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and heteroglossia. As a literary genre, poetry encapsulates some dominant discourses that serve the larger interests of Pakistani identity politics. As an example, ideologies relating to gender and linguistic sexism, nationalistic sentiments, and religious and spiritual ethos illustrate how textbooks orient learners toward ideological shaping of their being and belonging in the world that is mediated through language use and discourses embedded in English textbooks. These poetry texts, however, are not only ideologically loaded, but they are also socially alive artefacts that can be used by learners to negotiate alternative subjectivities and ways of thinking. In light of this perspective, we can argue that poetry texts that emphasise heteroglossic realities enable learners to question fixed and stabilised modes of beings as is evident in the poems that emphasise constant questioning, curiosity about nature, struggles, a clear understanding of the truth as a multifaceted entity, and the ability to never feel hopeless about one's life.

This study contributes theoretically to the representational dimension of language textbooks and more specifically poetry texts as dialogic in nature, which not only contain authoritarian voices as a result of the dominant social ideologies but also demonstrate how dissenting voices are represented in school language curricula. In language education, this means that language teaching not only embodies monoglossic realities, but also negotiates spaces of heteroglossia that provide opportunities for learners and teachers to engage in dialogue over identity formation and subjectivities. The study focused only on textbook data from one province of Pakistan. As a result, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to other parts of the country and the world. In order to shed light on how poetry works in terms of ideologies and values, other studies need to be conducted in different language-learning contexts. Additionally, we believe that taking learners into consideration in the data and how teachers use poetry texts in classrooms and impart their meanings to students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds will enable us to better understand poetry texts in terms of interaction and learning – two underexplored areas in textbook research (Canale, 2021; Goh, 2022). As Sunderland (2000) notes, even textbooks that appear to be highly non-sexist can become sexist in the hands of teachers with discriminatory views. In Pakistan, teachers are often seen as reflecting both tendencies i.e. either conforming to the dominant ideologies or resisting these meanings (authors, forthcoming). The findings have implications for teachers, textbook writers, and curriculum developers in contexts where poetry and textbooks serve ideological purposes. By critically reading poetry texts in English classes and engaging carefully in discourses on representation, teachers can keep up with the collective social fabric. These texts can be carefully used in classes to prevent ethnic, linguistic, religious, and gender-based inequalities and exclusions. The findings can also be used by curriculum developers and textbook writers regardless of the context to incorporate poetry as a form of literature to support inclusion, justice, and equality. As an example, linguistic sexism can be avoided by adding gender-inclusive language in addition to adding female poets to the textbooks to promote gender-just language pedagogy and linguistic competence (Knisely, 2022). Similarly, they can address issues of ethnic, racial, and religious imbalances. Finally, as teacher-scholars, we believe we can transition from just doing critical discourse analysis to engaging in praxis using a dialogic pedagogy that can facilitate the negotiation of content and pedagogy in a classroom environment that is inclusive of all students.

## Note

1. Single national curriculum (SNC) that was developed in 2021 was renamed as National Curriculum of Pakistan in 2022 (see <https://mofept.gov.pk/NewsDetail/Yjk4YzhjZGUtYTg0ZS00ZmRILThmNWetNTQwNTIkMGQzMjVI>)

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