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Namala Tilakaratna

**Teaching the Nation:  
Recontextualized National Identity in  
Sri Lankan English Language Textbooks**

**GEORG ECKERT  
INSTITUT**  
Leibniz-Institut für internationale  
Schulbuchforschung

**EDU | MERES**



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*Teaching the Nation:**Recontextualized National Identity in Sri Lankan English Language Textbooks***Introduction**

This study applies a discourse analytic approach to pedagogic texts in order to reveal how they ‘recontextualise’ (Bernstein, 1996/2000) knowledge to create a national identity. The texts were taken from Sri Lankan English language teaching textbooks produced and disseminated during the last three years of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, when hostilities were at their peak (2006-2009). The study applies the discourse analytic framework of ‘iconography’ to its exploration of national identity as discourse, in order to show how textbooks promote a Sri Lankan sense of identity that normalises and perpetuates a Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lankan identity as universal across all the country’s religions and ethnicities.

**National identity and English language teaching (ELT) textbook research**

In an overview of textbooks from a variety of contexts, Greaney (2006) notes that locally produced textbooks appear to represent ‘highly idealised views of one nation or group of people’ (p. 1) through a distortion of historical facts in favour of majoritarian ideals, the exclusion of minority groups and minority religions and narrow representations of nationalism such as favouring a particular ethnic or religious group. A plethora of studies on national identity in textbooks have explored the manner in which ‘master identities’ of religion, race, gender, ethnicity and national identity (Tracy, 2002, p. 18) are construed in textbooks teaching English as a second language and how they serve particular national and ideological interests (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Block & Cameron, 2002; Cheng & Beigi, 2012; Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger 2015; Edge, 2006; Gray, 2010; Ke, 2012; Lee & Collins, 2008, 2010; Opuku-Amankwa, Brew-Hammond, & Kofifah, 2011; Schneer, 2007). While these studies collectively present an extensive overview of how nations and nationalisms are represented in ELT textbooks, they share some methodological issues that will be addressed in this paper. The major gap in research that this paper attempts to fill is the lack of an appropriate methodology for explorations of how national identity in textbooks constitutes a ‘recontextualisation’ (Bernstein, 1996/2000) of knowledge about communal identity for pedagogic purposes.

One of the most frequently used methodologies identified in studies on textbook research is ‘content analysis’ or ‘text’ and ‘image’ analysis to identify what counts as discursive representations of national identity. A drawback of this approach is that these

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studies tend to treat identity as an ‘a priori’ category by first ‘assuming a particular identity, and asking how it comes about’ (Widdicombe, 1998, p. 204) and in some instances labelling discourses without the use of a rigorous analytical framework to support the decisions made about how identity is construed in text (Potter, Wetherell, Gill, & Edwards, 1990). In a number of these studies, discourses on national identity are reduced to discrete words in the text that analysts, as members of a particular community or culture, can identify as symbolic representations of national identity. Weninger and Kiss (2013) note that these approaches examine ‘learning materials as carriers of cultural information alone’ and thus ‘cannot do justice to the complex process of meaning making through which cultural meanings emerge’ (p. 695). In order to understand what national identity is and how it is constructed in ELT textbooks, a rigorous linguistic framework is needed that accounts for how meanings are construed in texts as a whole. This approach needs to move beyond the coding and quantification of discrete words as evidence of national identity at work and instead examine how specific discourse creates identity through texts, so that national identity emerges as a category that is construed through language. The approach should account for ways in which pedagogical texts recontextualise knowledge in an attempt to teach students how to be ideal citizens.

**Introduction to the context: Sri Lankan national identity**

Sri Lanka is a small island situated off the southern coast of India with a population of approximately 20 million people. Since the sixteenth century Sri Lanka has been repeatedly colonised by a series of other nation states: by the Portuguese (1505-1658), the Dutch (1640-1796)<sup>1</sup> and finally by the British (1815-1948) (de Silva, 2005). Sri Lanka was granted independence in 1948 and became a republic in 1972<sup>2</sup>. It has three major ethnic groups of which the largest is the Sinhalese, who speak ‘Sinhala’ as their main language and comprise 82 per cent of the population. The two major minorities, who

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<sup>1</sup> The Portuguese and Dutch controlled parts of the island at the same time as Sinhalese rulers ruled their own independent kingdoms. Once the British gained control from the Dutch they captured the last Kingdom of Sri Lanka the Kandyan in 1815, essentially unifying the island under a single ruler (de Silva, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> The formation of the republic in 1972 saw the introduction of a new constitution and the adoption of ‘Sri Lanka’ as the official name of the country instead of ‘Ceylon’. Also see (Welikala, 2012) for a comprehensive overview of the newly formed constitution.

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predominantly speak ‘Tamil’, are the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sri Lankan Muslim Moors comprising 11.1 per cent and 9.3 per cent of the population respectively<sup>3</sup>. The main religions of the country are Buddhism, practiced by 70.1 per cent of the population, primarily Sinhalese people, followed by Hinduism (12.6%), Islam (9.7%), Roman Catholicism (6.2%) and Christianity (1.4%)<sup>4</sup>. In modern times, Sri Lanka has become widely known for its ethnic civil war between the insurgent group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (hereafter the LTTE) who sought a separatist state in the North of the country, and the Sri Lankan Government (generally believed to represent the majority Sinhalese). The war ended in 2009 with the assassination of the leader of the LTTE by Sri Lankan armed forces.

Modern Sri Lankan nationalism fuses together the majority ethnic identity of the ‘Sinhalese’ with the majority religion of ‘Buddhism’ (Bartholomeusz, 2002; de Silva Wijeratne, 2013; Deegalle, 2006, 2013; DeVotta, 2007). According to Kearney (1985) the main mitigating factor of the ethnic civil war, which rose to its pinnacle following violent riots in 1983, was the 1972 constitution which fused together Sinhala and Buddhist nationalist claims through political ratification. In other words, the constitution gave Sinhala the status of the sole official language (ignoring the demands of the Tamil people), denied any concept of federalism (ignoring Tamil agitations for a separate state) and gave Buddhism the ‘foremost’ place in the constitution when it was initially proposed in 1972. Buddhism’s primary place in the constitution was later ratified in the constitutional amendments of 2000 (Schontal, 2012). Thus while the two movements of Sinhala and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism emerged as two separate reactions to British occupation, they were fused together in the early postcolonial constitution becoming the majority ethno-religious identity (of the Sinhala Buddhists) which was separate from other minority identities such as the Tamils, the Muslim Moors etc.

The end of the ethnic civil war, under the government of former president Mahinda Rajapakse and his party the Sri Lanka Nidahas Pakshaya (The Sri Lanka Freedom Party), resulted in a resurgence of nationalism that is classified as a form of ‘new patriotism’ by Wickremasinghe (2010). She states that this form of patriotism ‘merges nation

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<sup>3</sup> Sri Lanka also has other ethnic groups that together account for less than 0.1% of the population such as the Muslim Malays, the Indian Tamils and the Burghers.

<sup>4</sup> Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics (2012).

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and state, and ... promotes a love of the country based on a particular reading of the Sinhalese people's foundation myth, a reading in which all other groups – those formerly known as minorities – are only presented as shadows' (p. 160). She further declares that 'even expressions of banal nationalism can, in some cases, alienate cultural minorities. The regime and especially the president are constantly flagging Sinhala Buddhist nationhood in public life, as well as policing the private lives of citizens' (pp. 160-161). Manifestations of post-war Sinhala Buddhist nationalism included the rise of the militant Bodu Bala Sena organisation, which organised protests against Christian and Muslim establishments, resulting in civil unrest between ethnic groups and rioting in the south of the country (Gunatilleke, 2015). More recently, the 'Sinha-LEY' (translated as 'lion's blood') campaign has emerged, which promotes the notion that ethnic differences are rooted in physical and biological reality rather than social and cultural differences (Ramachandran, 2016). Thus the exploration of how communal identity is represented in state-produced textbooks is of paramount importance if ethnic and communal harmony are to be ensured in the fragile post-war context of Sri Lanka. It is also vital to investigate how Sri Lankans have learnt the divisive rhetoric that fuels movements such as those described above.

**Recontextualisation of texts for 'teaching' the nation**

Sri Lankan nationalistic discourse construes the Sinhala and Sinhala Buddhist nations as ancient and primordial with mytho-historical and ethno-religious origins (Hall, 1992). This study explores how these imaginings are recontextualised for pedagogical purposes in textbooks, which still remain one of the most powerful forms of teaching material available to educators in different pedagogical contexts (Apple, 2004; Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). As sociologist Basil Bernstein (1996/2000) states:

In all modern societies the school is a crucial device for writing and rewriting national consciousness, and national consciousness is constructed of the myths of origins, achievements and destiny... it is inevitable under these conditions that education becomes a crucial means and an arena for struggle to produce and reproduce a specific national consciousness... there are ranges of school practices, rituals, celebrations and emblems which work to this effect and of course there are also the crucial discourses of language, literature and history (p. xxiii).

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According to Bernstein, as texts are appropriated for pedagogic purposes they go through a process of ‘transformation’ wherein they are ‘decontextualised’ and then ‘re-contextualised’ for the purposes of teaching students national consciousness, amongst other things. Bernstein notes that in this process of ‘decontextualising’ texts go through the following processes, changing them from their original form. (Bernstein, 1977/2003, p. 192) [emphasis mine]:

1. The text has *changed* its position in relation to other texts, practices and position.
2. The text itself has been *modified* by selection, simplification, condensation and elaboration.
3. The text has been *repositioned* and *refocused*.

In other words, pedagogical texts, as they are transformed for the purposes of transmitting cultural knowledge, no longer construe ‘reality’ or communal identity as they exist external to the text. Instead, communal identity is transformed for the purposes of transmission and thus ‘recontextualised’ in textbooks for pedagogic purposes. This point is crucial for any studies that examine textbooks and pedagogic discourse and demands an approach that extends beyond that of arbitrary selections of lexical items construing identity or surface level content analyses, to viewing the text as a whole and the text as transformed for the purposes of teaching the nation. This study introduces the iconography framework developed by Tann (2013) in order to explore communal identity as a discursive construct before applying the framework to a text in order to show how Sri Lankan national identity is recontextualised for pedagogical purposes.

### **Iconography: A social semiotic approach to national identity**

In order to uncover how nationalism is construed in English language textbooks in Sri Lanka, a recently developed linguistic framework for examining national identity as created and construed through language will be used. The ‘iconography’ framework is based on the theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics, which views language as a social semiotic resource for making meaning. From the perspective of education policy and textbook creation, the linguistic creation of national identity functions as

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a form of symbolic control and as a way in which governments can transmit nationalistic ideology to students (Bernstein, 1996/2000). Sinhala Buddhist nationalism emerges in the textbook in a number of complex ways through the interaction between symbols, which index identity both overtly and implicitly with reference to the relevant social context. Iconography is used to uncover some of the strategies that normalise the reading of a text that is overtly nationalistic to make it appear more as a description of the natural order of things rather than a particular ideologically motivated perspective of the social context in which the text occurs. The iconography framework (Tann, 2010b, 2013) will be discussed briefly before applying the framework to three texts from Sri Lankan English language textbooks for Grade 11 pupils.

Iconography has evolved as a tool for examining identity in a range of different contexts such as in the exploration of Japanese national identity in *Nihonjinron* texts, the context of the Australian military discourse (Thomson 2014) and the legal setting of youth justice conferencing (Zappavigna, Dwyer, and Martin 2008; Martin and Zappavigna 2013). In mapping icons as a linguistic resource, a number of symbols central to discourses about identity were identified, such as references to community membership or *Gemeinschaft*; valued tokens such as peoples and things that represent a community or *Oracles*; and finally cherished values of a community or *Doxa*. Tann (2010) effectively demonstrates the use of icons in Obama’s first presidential campaign as illustrated in figure 1 below:

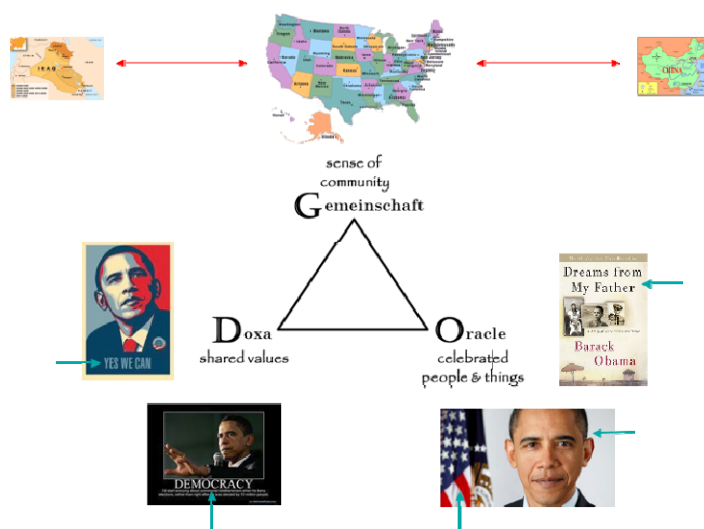


Figure 1: Obama Iconography (Tann, 2010)



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As illustrated in Figure 1, the concept of America in terms of community membership or *Gemeinschaft* is identified in relation to nationality as a group: ‘Americans’ as opposed to other nationalities such as Chinese or Iraqis for example. These are often referred to through the use of collective pronouns such as ‘us’ (as opposed to them) and ‘we’ or through the reference to place ‘in America’. The values or *Doxa* that are associated with the above *Gemeinschaft* and used as slogans that represent ‘American’ values are concepts such as ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ while the slogan most associated with the Obama campaign is the adage ‘yes we can’. Finally, the celebrated person or *Hero* of the campaign is Obama himself, who is used in posters and banners fused with other major icons such as the *Relic* symbolising America, the American flag. In addition, Obama as the Hero is associated in particular with creations attributed to him that were popularized during the campaign, such as his autobiographical work ‘Dreams from my Father’, that function as the final type of verbiage or *Scripture*. All the labels referring to types of icons (e.g. Heroes, Relics, Rituals, Doxa, Gemeinschaft etc.,) are presented in this work with an initial capital letter in order to distinguish between the common-sense references to these concepts and their use as analytical labels.

Nationalistic texts, such as the Obama iconography shown in figure 1 contain all three icons of Gemeinschaft, Doxa and Oracle with the text shifting through phases of community membership to tokens that exemplify this membership through reference to valued people or Heroes and the products or Relics to cherished values or Doxa. Identifying these icons, mapping their shift across a text and examining what information is brought to the fore by the texts uncovers the presence of nationalist discourse within the textbooks and will be used to uncover Sinhala Buddhist identity in Sri Lankan English language teaching texts.

### **Sri Lankan English language teaching textbooks: description of the data**

The grade 11 ELT textbook examined in this study is produced by the National Institute of Education and is the main text for the GCSE English language exams<sup>5</sup>. Sri Lankan students sit GCSE exams at the age of 16. Therefore, the textbook content reflects the

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<sup>5</sup> Based on the British education system, the General Certificate of Secondary Education is the first formal educational qualification attained by students in secondary school. Students are required to pass several subjects (such as English, Maths etc.,) in order to pass the GCSE.

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minimum level of achievement in formal education that is awarded to students as school certification. English is a compulsory subject and one of the subjects (others include maths and vernacular languages) that students must pass in order to achieve the GCSE qualification and advance to the final two years of secondary school where they sit Advanced Level or university entrance exams. The government-produced English language textbooks are the only textbooks that are distributed across the country to all schools, whereas all other textbooks are translated from Sinhala to Tamil and then distributed to the respective Sinhala or Tamil schools (Wickrema & Colenso, 2003). Thus *all* students, regardless of their ethnic or religious identity are exposed to the same ELT texts if they attend public school. In a lower middle-income country like Sri Lanka, where textbooks are often the only teaching material available to teachers and students, they consequently play an important role in the formation of a national consciousness. Section 1.5 below introduces the English language textbooks examined in this study and discusses the selection of texts for analysis.

The *English: Pupil's book* for Grade 11 is published by the Educational Publications Department, which is the centralised body for publication and dissemination of curricular material across Sri Lanka. As an introduction to the textbook 'A Word to the Teacher' indicates the texts included in it are 'mostly 'home grown', drawing on a wealth of traditions, folklore and even the literature of the country' (Grade 11 English Pupil's Book – Part 1, p vii).

The grade 11 book has eight chapters and is divided into two parts, each of which focuses on a particular theme. Part one includes chapters titled 1) *Relationships*, 2) *Culture*, 3) *Health and Safety*, 4) *The Changing World* and 5) *Civilisations*. Part 2 includes the chapters titled 6) *Communication*, 7) *Environment* 8) *Globalisation*. Each chapter begins with a 'language focus' section, which introduces basic structural grammar relevant to the chapter. This is followed by a short comprehension passage including vocabulary activities and then usually a writing task. In addition, each chapter contains a component of spoken English practice using drills, role plays and scripted dialogue.

For the purpose of this study, The *Legends* text from chapter 2 on 'Culture' was selected for analysis because it includes a famous mytho-historical folktale about the establishment of Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist nation and is widely attributed to the

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seminal historical text the *Mahavamsa*, which is used as the primary source for the history of Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist nation (Obeyesekere 2002).

**Analysis and discussion: how texts construe national identity**

This section focuses on a detailed analysis of a single text that functions as a ‘narrative of the nation’ and thus represents a ‘telling and retelling of national histories’ (Hall, 1992, p. 293). The text explored in this study (hereafter referred to as *Legends*) focuses on Sri Lankan national Heroes who strongly evoke Sinhala Buddhist national identity. Heroes are used in the service of nation building because they personalise the historical events that function as grand narratives of national identity (Obeyesekere, 2002a, p. 4). In addition, Heroes give a face and name to the notion of the ‘patriotic citizen’ promoted by the Grade 11 textbook (Amarasekera et al., 2011, p. ix) in the Sri Lankan context because they embody cherished Sri Lankan values and thus form part of what constitutes a Sri Lankan sense of community.

**Legends: description of the text**

The *Legends* text presents one version of a part-mythical historical story that focuses on events that are supposed to have occurred approximately two thousand years ago in Sri Lanka.<sup>6</sup> It follows the journey of the main character, Bulatha, whose job it is to travel to the royal palace to provide betel ‘chews’<sup>7</sup> to the king. According to this version of the story, in order to make the journey to the palace easier, Bulatha and his wife built two structures, which are identified as the ‘Gal Padi Hela’ (the stone steps) and the ‘Sorabora Wewa’<sup>8</sup> (the lake): two renowned sites of the Mahiyanganaya Period, which is famed

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<sup>6</sup> Leach (1996) states that ‘myth’ is an ‘ill defined category’ which is used to mean ‘fallacious history – a story about the past we know to be false; to say that an event is “mythical” is equivalent to saying that it didn’t happen... the anthropologist’s usual view [is] that “myth is a sacred tale”. If we accept this kind of latter definition the special quality of myth is not that it is false but that it is divinely true for those who believe, but fairy-tale for those who do not’ (p. 67).

<sup>7</sup> The word ‘chews’ refers to small parcels of betel leaves with condiments that are consumed for recreational purposes in parts of South and South East Asia (Rooney, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Note that the original text refers to the Relic the Sorabora Wewa as a single word (i.e. Soraborawewa) or as two words (i.e. Sorabora Wewa). The Relic will be referred to as ‘Sorabora Wewa’ keeping the proper name (Sorabora) as a Classifier and the Thing (‘wewa’ meaning ‘lake’) separate. All of the examples taken from the text will present the name of the lake exactly as it is produced in the original text.

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for being a period of Buddhist renaissance in South Asia (de Silva, 2005). The *Legends* text concludes with a moral extrapolated from the story about the importance of hard work for social benefit rather than monetary gain. An overview of the structure of the *Legends* text is given in figure 2 below.

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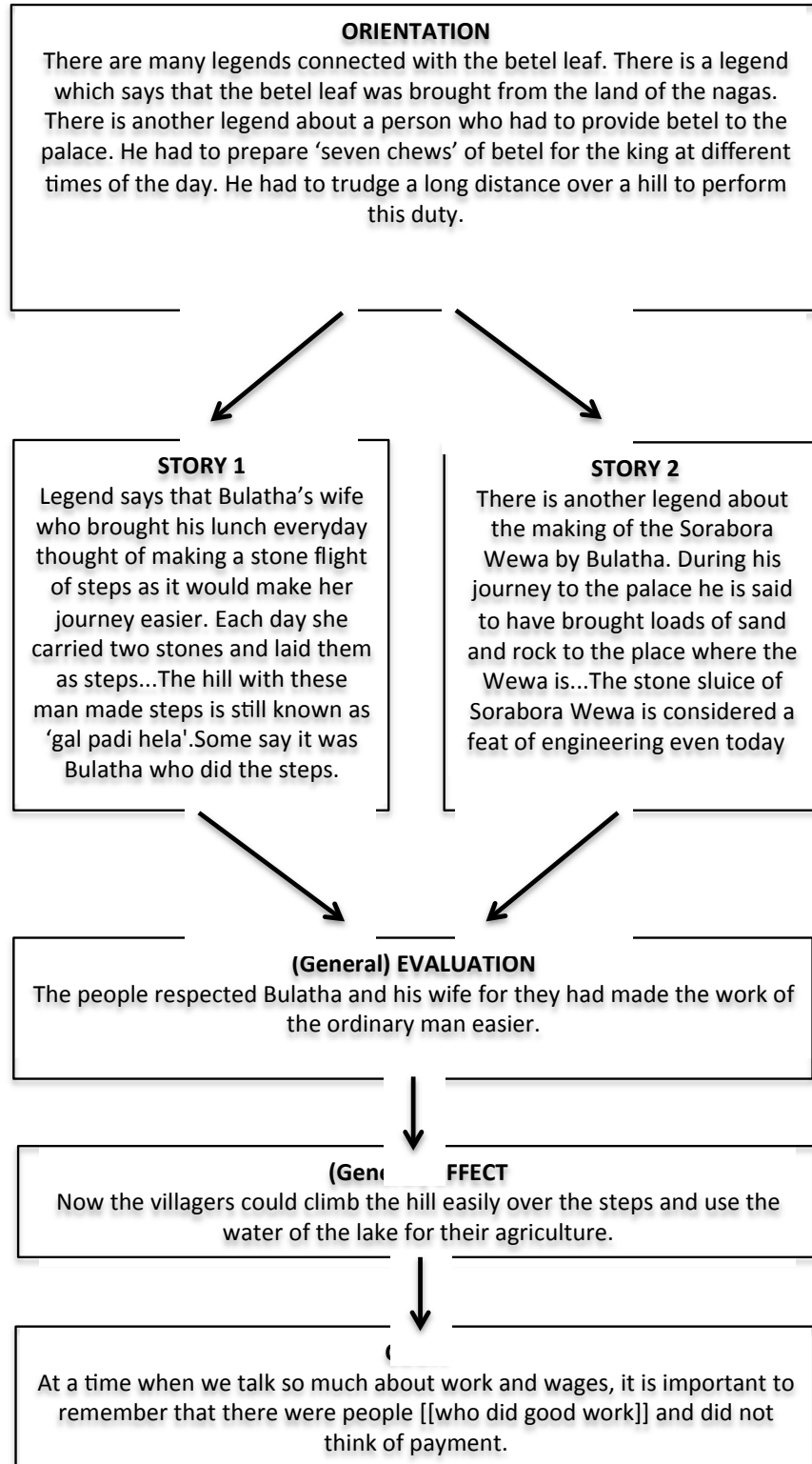


Figure 2: Genre structure of the Legends text

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The *Legends* text is based on a popular folktale which relates the manner in which a mythical giant, named Bulatha, created two archaeological sites during the time of King Dutugemunu (161 - 137 BCE) whose reign is chronicled in the *Mahavamsa*, a canonical historical text originally written in the sixth century CE and updated in the thirteenth, fourteenth and eighteenth centuries (Geiger, 1912). The *Mahavamsa* is the seminal historical text used as evidence for origins of Sri Lankan nationalism. Bechert (1987) and Obeyesekere (2003) credit it with helping to create Sinhala Buddhist identity in a way that previous historical texts did not. In the *Mahavamsa*<sup>9</sup>, a chapter is devoted to the ‘victory’ of King Dutugemunu, who is attributed with reuniting the island under Sinhala Buddhist rule after a long period of occupation by a Tamil Hindu empire. While the folktale included in the *Legends* text is not included in the *Mahavamsa*, the tale is based in the historical period to which the text relates. The *Legends* text has emerged from Sri Lanka’s rich and complex tradition of ‘folklore’ and despite its exclusion from the *Mahavamsa*, it has been repeatedly recounted in oral and written form. Most recently this story has been retold in three texts by popular Sinhala authors (Kahandawaarachchi, 2002; Suriyaarachchi, 2004, 2011) who focus on folklore. In all these texts, the narrative of Bulatha, his wife and their creations is attributed as being one of the stories that constitute the ‘foundational myths’ of Sri Lankan national identity as stated in the forewords to the published narratives.

Canonical accounts of Bulatha related in Sinhala (such as Kahandawaarachchi, 2002; Suriyaarachchi, 2004, 2011) focus on Bulatha’s superhuman attributes as a ‘yodaya’ (giant) to show the extraordinary skill and strength required to build the dam and the stone steps<sup>10</sup>. The ‘yodayas’ are accorded a special mythical status as revered Heroes in Sri Lankan history and literature with the ‘dasa maha yodayo’ or the ten giants who lived during King Dutugemunu’s time being attributed with a number of heroic feats. Bulatha is considered unofficially to be an eleventh yodaya or giant who is mythicised in popular renditions of the folktale such as the one recounted in the *Legends* text below. The textbook version, however, re-writes the character of Bulatha as an ‘ordinary’ person, who along with his wife, perseveres to create two valuable and renowned

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<sup>9</sup> See the *Mahavamsa*, chapter xxv (Geiger, 1912).

<sup>10</sup> For instance in the two canonical versions of the text state that Bulatha and his wife are giants (Kahandawaarachchi, 2002; Suriyaarachchi, 2004, 2011).

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archaeological sites, without any special powers or attributes focussing instead on their tenacity. The iconography analysis of the *Legends* text is presented below with a view to explaining how the textbook ‘recontextualises’ this text for the purpose of teaching Sri Lankan students about their national identity.

**Icons in the *Legends* text: analysis and discussion**

The section below will examine the *Legends* text for the presence of the following icons: *Heroes* and *Relics* (celebrated people and things), *Doxa* (cherished values) and *Gemeinschaft* (sense of community).

**Heroes and Relics**

The strategies that shift Bulatha and his wife from the status of ordinary people to that of Heroes representative of Sri Lankan national identity are as follows. Firstly, both Bulatha and his wife are the only participants capable of action in the text. Therefore, they are construed as ‘agentive’ in the text as shown in the example below (underlined). In each of the instances presented below, the Heroes Bulatha and his wife are also responsible for creations that are later revealed to be the famous Sri Lankan monuments the Gal Padi Hela (the stone steps) and the Sorabora Wewa (the lake) (see example below, bold).

***Example: Heroes and their Relics***

Each day she carried **two stones**

and (she) laid **them** as steps

During his journey to the palace, he is said to have brought **loads of sand and rock to**

**the place where the wewa is**

creating **a tank**

The above clauses construe the protagonists as having agency over the actions in the text, helping to portray them as tenacious Heroes. This also creates a link between the Heroes and their creations, the Relics of the stone steps and the lake, which are brought into existence by the effort of the Heroes.

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In addition to construing the Heroes as active participants, and the Relics as the results of their efforts, the text evaluates the Heroes and Relics. Firstly, the events surrounding the building of these two monuments are elevated to the status of 'legend' rather than just a story. The evaluation carried by the word legend positively colours Bulatha and his wife and their actions:

*Example: Evaluation of Bulatha and his wife*

There is another LEGEND about **a person who had to provide betel to the palace.**

LEGEND says that **Bulatha's wife** who brought his lunch *every day* thought of making a stone flight of steps as it would make her journey easier.

There is another LEGEND about the making of the Sorabora Wewa **by Bulatha.** Bulatha and his wife are also evaluated by other participants in the text such as the king and the people in the village who benefited from the stone steps and the lake:

*Example: Heroes as targets of evaluation*

He **had succeeded** in making a dam across the river, creating a lake.

He **was praised** by the king.

The people **respected** [Bulatha and his wife] for they had made the work of the ordinary man easier

The Relics, the Gal Padi Hela and Sorabora Wewa, also function as targets of positive evaluation:



*Teaching the Nation:**Recontextualized National Identity in Sri Lankan English Language Textbooks****Example: Evaluation targeting the Sorabora Wewa***

[t]he hill with these man made steps **is still known as ‘gal padi hela’**

Sorabora Wewa is **one of the earliest hydrological constructions in our country**

It is in Mahiyanganaya **which is one of the earliest seats of civilisation in Sri Lanka**

There are **many folk tales and folk songs about the beauty of ‘SoraboraWewa’**

The stone sluice of SoraboraWewa is considered a feat of engineering skill **unsurpassed**

The fact that these monuments are evaluated according to their historical significance means that they are able to contribute to the iconisation of Bulatha and his wife as Heroes. This happens because the monuments built by these two protagonists not only affect the people and community in the text but also exist as valued archaeological artefacts in Sri Lanka today. It is also worth noting that the ‘wewa’ plays a significant cultural role as a valued Relic in folktales and in Sinhala literature and thus has a valued place in the popular imagination. The ‘wewa’ along with the Relics of the ‘dagoba’ (temple) and ‘yaya’ (paddyfield) were three Relics that make reference to the former agrarian and irrigation-based civilisations of ancient Sri Lanka and were revived in discourses of national identity and used by nationalists as the basis for rallying against British rule (Moore, 1989).

By making these Heroes agentive, and by evaluating their actions and the outcomes of those actions positively, the mythical protagonists of the *Legends* text become Heroes exemplifying the cherished values of Sri Lanka. This allows the text to move from simply recounting events involving the two protagonists to showing how their actions exemplify the cherished values or the Doxa of Sinhala Buddhist identity.

**Doxa**

In iconography, Heroes and their actions are the exemplars of the cherished values of a community or its ‘Doxa’ (Tann, 2010b, 2013). The Doxa draws out the moral significance of the narrative and is condensed with evaluative meanings that ‘constrain’ the readers’ interpretation of the story (Tann, 2013, p. 374). In other words, once the Doxa of the *Legends* text is revealed, the actions of Bulatha and his wife need to be interpret-

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ed in relation to it. The Doxa in the *Legends* text occurs in a position of prominence in the final stage of the text:

***Example: Doxa in the coda of the text***

At a time when we talk so much about work and wages, it is important [[to remember that there were people who did good work // and did not think of payment

The fact that the Doxa occurs in this stage of the text ensures that the narrative and recount of Bulatha and his wife are interpreted in relation to the values that are propagated by the Doxa of selfless work without hope of monetary gain.

The Doxa of ‘good work without pay’ in the context of Sri Lanka is an intertextual reference to the popular and highly valued Sri Lankan (and particularly Sinhala Buddhist) Doxa of ‘shramadana’, which means donating time for communal benefit without any hope of personal gain or remuneration (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1990, pp. 245-246). Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1990) argue that the notion of ‘shramadana’ is an ‘invention of tradition’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) that resulted from the anti-colonial movement of ‘Protestant Buddhism’ and evolved as an example of what constituted essential Buddhist values such as ‘selflessness’. The ability to retrieve the Sinhala Buddhist Doxa of ‘shramadana’ from the Doxa instantiated in the *Legends* text acts as a bonding mechanism between the student audience and the community that the text evokes.

The *Legends* text thus contains two invented traditions. The first of these is the alteration of Bulatha and his wife from ‘giants’ to ordinary people in order to make their efforts to build the two Relics more heroic. The second is the association of the events in the text with the Protestant Sinhala Buddhist Doxa of ‘shramadana’. The purpose of these ‘inventions’ is to respond to:

...[n]ovel situations which take the form of reference to old situations. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 2).

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The *Legends* text thus functions as a ‘meta-narrative’ that covers the time of Sinhala Buddhist renaissance. Therefore, the connection of an invented tradition of colonial Protestant Buddhism such as ‘shramadana’ to an ancient Sri Lankan folktale creates a sense of ‘continuity’ or ‘timelessness’ of the nation so that the artefacts, Heroes and values of Sri Lanka as a Sinhala Buddhist state appear to have remained constant through ‘all the vicissitudes of history’ (Hall, 1992, p. 294).

The Doxa instantiated in the final comment stage of the *Legends* text addresses a select audience of Sri Lankan Buddhist students, drawing on the knowledge that they have of Sinhala Buddhist Doxa and Heroes. Thus a connection is made between the Doxa and the community that it evokes, which can be identified as the third type of icon, ‘Gemeinschaft’. Gemeinschaft is concerned with a ‘sense of community’ which forms a link between the Heroes and Relics, the values they exemplify and the sense of community they evoke.

**Gemeinschaft**

The *Legends* text addresses a specific community of Sri Lankan Sinhala high school students. This is evident from the number of intertextual references that draw on cultural understanding through lexical borrowing and references to places and names (e.g. *Bulatha*, *Sorabora Wewa*, *Gal Padi Hela*, *Mahiyanganaya*) that are of cultural significance to Sri Lankans, and in particular Sinhala Buddhist history. In turn, these evoke a sense of Sinhala Buddhist community. In addition, the morals of hard work, contained in the coda to the text, are used to address a specific audience of Sri Lankan students leading them to admire the actions and creations of past Heroes related to the era of Sinhala Buddhist supremacy and idealised Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. This is discursively achieved by referring to a sense of community through the use of items of *Gemeinschaft* in the text. The text contains six instances of *Gemeinschaft*.

The *Legends* text contains four instances which refer to the nation as a geographical location. These ‘naturalise’ the concept of a nation state by referring to it as a place rather than a collective of people or the nation-state (Tann, 2010b, p. 123). The first instance is in the orientation of the text, as shown in the example below:

*Teaching the Nation:**Recontextualized National Identity in Sri Lankan English Language Textbooks****Example: Place as nation in the Legends text***

There is a legend which says that the betel leaf was brought **from the land of the Nagas**

In this example, ‘the land of the Nagas’ is an intertextual reference to the north of Sri Lanka which was called ‘the land of the Nagas’ during the Buddha’s time according to the sixth century text the *Mahavamsa*. The *Mahavamsa* reports that ‘Nagas’ were a race of mythical beings inhabiting the north of the island, who were later converted to Buddhism by the Buddha during one of his visits to Sri Lanka. This incident is considered an ‘undisputed’ fact in Sinhala Buddhist history despite its mythical origins (Obeyesekere, 2002). This means that when the betel leaves appear, as an artefact, in the text, they are already associated with Sri Lanka and pre-Buddhist mytho-historical origins well before the text draws on their relevance to the content of this story. The fact that betel leaves are associated with a mythical place, and one closely associated with a real place, invokes a sense of the Sinhala Buddhist community in the text without explicitly referring to the Sinhalese, to Buddhism or Sri Lanka as a nation. This means that similar to the *Doxa* instantiated in the Coda of the text, the reference to Sri Lanka as the ‘land of the Nagas’ requires the students to be able to unpack the intertextual reference to the mythical pre-Buddhist legends. Their ability to recognise this acts as a bonding mechanism between the ‘target’ audience and its author, both of whom belong to the community the text invokes.

The remaining three references to place are concentrated in the section that expands on the significance of the Sorabora Wewa as an ancient monument, as shown in the example below:

***Example: Place in the Legends text***

Sorabora Wewa is one of the earliest hydrological constructions **in our country**.

It is **in Mahiyanganaya** which is one of the earliest seats of civilisation **in Sri Lanka**.

The second example of place that invokes the nation (*in Mahiyanganaya*) is immediately elaborated upon in the text (*which is one of the earliest seats of civilisation in Sri*

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*Lanka*). Mahiyanganaya was a well-known kingdom of ancient Sri Lanka that was renowned for great irrigation-based engineering and innovation. As such, it is generally perceived as a time of Sinhala Buddhist Renaissance (de Silva, 2005). Mahiyanganaya also refers to a time of Buddhist revival (i.e. the Mahiyanganaya period) and is related to the mytho-historical source of Sinhala Buddhist origins of the nation (see Obeyesekera, 2002). This would be well known to a student audience, who concurrently learn about the Sinhala Buddhist kingdoms in their high school history curriculum (Gaul, 2015; Perera, 2009). In the text, rather than referring to a period in time, it refers to the location of the former kingdom. Therefore, this instance of place activates a Sinhala Buddhist identity through intertextual reference.

Most importantly, the text goes on to generalise Sinhala Buddhist identity as ‘Sri Lankan’ identity in its final reference to place (i.e. *in Sri Lanka*) Representing specific Sinhala Buddhist monuments (*the Sorabora Wewa* and *Gal Padi Hela*), Sinhala Buddhist Heroes (*Bulatha* and *his wife*) and the Sinhala Buddhist Gemeinschaft, in the form of place (*in Mahiyanganaya*), as related to Sri Lankan national history rather than to Sinhala Buddhist history.

The *Legends* text also evokes a sense of community through the use of two instances of Gemeinschaft collectivisation. Collectivisation construes social actors as categories and refers to collectives of people rather than individuals. It is usually instantiated through the use of personal pronouns such as ‘we’ and ‘us’ or as classifiers and qualifiers (*our*) in the nominal group functioning as participants in the transitivity of the clause<sup>11</sup>. The first reference to the collective nation in the *Legends* text is embedded within the reference to nation as place, which has been discussed above (clause 26: *in our country*), and concludes the sequence of events describing the construction of the Sorabora Wewa. This embedded reference to the collective activates a sense of identity by reminding the reader of the importance of the Sorabora Wewa to *their* collective social identity. The use of collectivisation also means that the audience is invited into the text and its message through being directly addressed. Further, the audience is expected to recognise the Sorabora Wewa as a well-known archaeological site in Sri Lanka. The

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<sup>11</sup> In Nihonjinron, the collective identities are often instantiated as oppositional identities for example ‘us’ vs. ‘them’. In contrast, oppositional identities in the Sri Lankan ELT texts are construed in relation to time where the past and present *Gemeinschaft* of Sri Lanka is associated with positive and negative values (Tann 2010b, p. 124).

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second instance of collectivisation is in the Coda of the *Legends* text where the audience is explicitly referred to through the use of the collective pronoun ‘we’:

***Example 3.10: Gemeinschaft collectivisation in the Coda to the text***

Clause 35:

At a time when **we** talk so much about work and wages, it is important to remember that there were people who did good work and did not think of payment.

The above reference to *Gemeinschaft* functions as the target of negative evaluation (e.g. *when we talk so much about work and wages*). Tann (2010b, 2013) states that in his study of Japanese Nihonjinron discourse, he found that *Gemeinschaft* is used to construct *oppositional* identities. For example texts often contain the binaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’ as oppositions created between different nations i.e. Japan as ‘us’ as opposed to America as ‘them’. Likewise, it is argued here that the *Legends* text constructs an opposition between ‘us’, being the ‘we’ in the present, and ‘them’, being ‘people’ from the past - Bulatha and his wife. Notably, the text positively evaluates people in the past with Bulatha and his wife being praised as ‘people who did good work and did not think of payment’ while the reference to the audience ‘we’ is negatively evaluated: ‘at a time when we talk so much about work and wages’. The position being presented here is that Sri Lankans in the past worked for the benefit of the community as a whole and not for monetary gain, whereas contemporary Sri Lankans are more concerned with ‘work and wages’ than work for the public good. Thus the text creates ‘Othering’,<sup>12</sup> *within* the *Gemeinschaft* of Sri Lankan identity which draws attention to the threat of modernisation and a loss of connection to the past. In other words, Sri Lankan identity in the *Legends* text is split between what constitutes modern Sri Lanka (us) and ancient Sri Lanka (them), with the people and values of *ancient* Sri Lanka being iconised and held up as an ideal to be achieved by future generations.

**Conclusion**


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<sup>12</sup> The creation of a self/other dichotomy in postcolonial discourse in referring to one’s own nation as the ‘self’ and all other nations as the ‘other’ (Said, 1977).

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This study set out to use the discourse analytic approach of ‘iconography’ to uncover how national identity is discursively constructed in English language teaching texts in Sri Lanka. The analysis undertaken in this study was applied to a single mytho-historical ‘narrative of the nation’ which was aimed at promoting the actions and contributions of two mythical folk Heroes ‘Bulatha’ and his wife. The analysis shows how over the course of the text, the two participants Bulatha and his wife are presented as tenacious Heroes who work tirelessly to create two archaeological monuments that remain significant in modern Sri Lanka. The text concludes by drawing on the ‘invented tradition’ of the Sinhala Buddhist Doxa ‘shramadana’ which highlights the value of doing work, not for remuneration, but for the advancement and development of the community. This recontextualises the text in order to teach students how to be exemplary Sri Lankans. Finally, a nuanced exploration of types of *Gemeinschaft* or references to communal identity in the text show how it goes a step further in generalising the Doxa of ‘shramadana’ and the Heroes of the text as representative of *all* Sri Lankans rather than representative of the Sinhala Buddhist majority which is the *Gemeinschaft* to which the Heroes, Relics and Doxa traditionally belong.

The text also draws on the element of ‘time’ in order to create an opposition between Sri Lankans of the past (represented by the two Heroes the text focuses on) and people in the present who are concerned with ‘work and wages’, thereby leading the audience to positively evaluate the Heroes of the text and their values, which are the values of ancient Sri Lanka, as opposed to the modern values that threaten the cherished traditions of Sri Lanka as a nation. This shunting between past and present in the text captures what Bhabha (1990) refers to as the ‘disjunctive time of the nation’s modernity’ (p. 294). In other words, the *Legends* text draws on past events which constitute the ‘ancient’ origins of the nation while attempting to make them relevant to the modern post-colonial nationalism that is discursively constructed in the Sri Lankan ELT textbooks. This legitimates the Sinhala Buddhist nationalism that underpins Sri Lankan national identity today as the text represents a formulation of national identity that looks to the past for a sense of cohesion and continuity in re-inventing the modern nation.

This study has shown that an ‘iconography’ analysis supplemented by historical and socio-political research can reveal the way in which a seemingly innocuous folktale is highly nationalistic in content. More importantly, the content that is Sinhala Buddhist in

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orientation is generalised across all Sri Lankans making the Heroes and their creations the basis for promoting Sinhala Buddhist values. This study also shows that a rigorous analytical framework such as ‘iconography’ can be used to explain how a national identity can be created and in particular, how that identity can be *recontextualised* through a pedagogical text. These findings provide a small but crucial step in recognising the means by which majoritarian nationalism is promoted as common across all ethnicities and religions in English Language Teaching textbooks.

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