

Recipient Design in *American English File(AEF)*: A discourse analysis based on Gee’s model

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Abstract

One of the highly recommended and largely used EFL textbooks in Iran is *American English File (AEF)*, published by Oxford University Press. To understand its potential effect on readers' viewpoints and discover the underlying mindsets, the discourse of *American English File 3*, third edition, was analyzed based on James Paul Gee's framework (2018), with a focus on his concept of "recipient design", which involves how the readers of a text are supposed to read and react in certain ways and shape some aspects of their identity. Therefore, ten texts were selected from different parts of the book. To capture the recipient design of the texts, the highlighted and marginalized social goods, and Discourses in the texts were identified. Then, the readers' represented identity, the major actions of the texts and the potential effects on the readers were discovered. The findings revealed that the discourse of the textbook represents the issues of contemporary metropolitan life, reflecting the values of individualism including individual success, health and achievements. This study contributes to how language teaching materials influence the identity of readers.

Keywords: Language Teaching; Textbooks; Identity; Social Good; Activity.

Introduction

For those aiming to learn and/or teach a foreign language, the importance of language textbooks, serving as guides and sources of knowledge is undeniable (Tomlinson 2011). Thus, textbook authors must carefully consider the range of identity options offered to the learners by the textbooks (Pavlenko and Norton 2007). *American English File* series is among highly acclaimed English language teaching textbooks that are strongly recommended by English instructors and therefore, extensively used by English learners in Iran (Ashraf and Kazemi 2017). Consequently, the discourse and conceptual frameworks within this series have the potential to influence and shape the cognitive perspectives of a vast number of learners.

Yasemi and Aghagolzadeh (2016) and Derakhshan (2018) have studied AEF textbooks, using CDA models suggested by Van Dijk (1998) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). They concluded that the textbook promotes Western ideological values and discourse, highlighting values such as capitalism, consumerism, and racism and propagating for western music, goods, etc. However, to the authors' of the present article their conclusion should be reconsidered by contextual exploration of text samples through an advanced toolkit such as Gee's discourse analysis, as he seems to have considered some very common features of universal culture as attributes of Western cultures. Moreover, no analysis has been carried out on the discourse of the third edition of *American English File* textbook. Also, no study has specifically focused on the identity elements of cultural and ideological factors represented in the textbook and the potential influence on the readers' identity. Additionally, Gee's (2018) concept of recipient design, which examines how language use shapes readers' interpretation and reaction which offers a suitable

framework for this study has not been used by the previous researchers. As a matter of fact, this case study aimed at exploring samples of AEF texts to assess the authors' hypothesis which is AEF texts are not ideologic and in favor of disseminating western culture as some researchers have pointed out (Derakhshan, 2018).

The present study analyzes the discourse of volume 3 of the third edition of AEF. through Gee's discourse analysis which serves as a tool to examine and evaluate textbook content. Such analysis is useful in finding the ideology embedded in AEF and discovers the underlying conceptual framework and viewpoints of the authors.

Review of Literature

Zenker (2018) argues that the complex interplay between language and identity has two sides. People usually express their identities through language while the language they use can shape their identity. Identity is an outcome of cultural semiotics so that "in many ways, the study of linguistic anthropology is the study of language and identity" (Bucholtz and Haal 2005, 369). Therefore, this field of study explores not just the types of speech but also the kinds of speakers who, through their use of language, create and recreate particular identities.

Sarah (2018) sees identities as constructed through social interactions and in defining social and political organizations, language plays a central role. Identity is dynamic and socially constructed within language and discourse (Darvin and Norton 2015). In other words, every time we produce language, we are creating, recreating, modifying or simply displaying some aspects of our identity. When it comes to learning a language, the situation is exactly the same. Similarly, language learners form and reform their personal and social identities in relation to others when they communicate with members of the target language community (Norton 2013).

Language learning is a complex process that can reconstruct learners' identity (Kinginger 2004). By understanding how materials are designed with specific influence on learners' mindset, educators can make informed decisions about the selection and adaptation of materials to enhance language learning experiences (Shrum and Glisan 2010). These insights are potential to inform curriculum development and teaching strategies.

The design of language learning materials is influenced by cultural and contextual factors. Kramersch (1993) has examined how these factors impact the representation of language and culture in textbooks. Swales (2007) has also examined how language textbooks and materials are tailored to meet learners' characteristics and expectations. These studies acknowledge that language learning materials are not passive resources but active participants in shaping learning experiences and emphasize the dynamic relationship between material design and learners' identities.

The literature on reader identity in relation to the *American English File* (AEF) series highlights the complex interaction between language learning and identity construction. Scholars broadly agree that English language textbooks are not neutral tools but cultural artifacts that shape learners' perceptions of themselves and others. This body of research explores how AEF mediates between global English and local identities, often creating tensions between cultural representation, learner engagement, and ideological influence.

Research consistently emphasizes the role of textbooks in shaping intercultural competence and identity. Byram (1997) argues that language learning involves developing the ability to navigate multiple cultures. In his view in AEF, the communicative "get-them-talking" approach encourages learners to adopt various social roles, allowing them to experiment with new identities in a relatively safe environment.

Similarly, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) conceptualize textbooks as “cultural mirrors.” They classify AEF as a target-culture textbook that reflects American norms and lifestyles. While this provides authentic input, it may also create an “identity gap” for learners whose own cultures are underrepresented, leading to comparisons between idealized Western life and local realities.

Critical analyses highlight ideological biases within AEF. Litz (2000) identifies a predominance of middle-class, urban, Western values, which can render diverse learner identities invisible. This may force learners either to assimilate into the textbook’s worldview or to disengage from it. Yen (2000) similarly finds that ESL materials tend to reflect multicultural inclusivity more effectively than EFL textbooks, which often lack alignment with learners’ sociocultural contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, Ghasemi and Haghverdi (2012) evaluate AEF using Littlejohn’s framework and conclude that, despite some shortcomings, the series demonstrates strong pedagogical value and internal consistency. However, cultural concerns remain central to identity formation. Norton (2013) introduces the concept of “investment,” suggesting that learners engage more deeply when they identify with the social worlds presented in textbooks. If AEF portrays desirable lifestyles, learners may adopt a cosmopolitan identity; if not, they may resist or disengage.

Further studies reinforce the issue of cultural imbalance. Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2013) and Chao (2011) argue that global textbooks prioritize Western culture, often marginalizing local identities and presenting limited or stereotypical representations of diversity. Derakhshan (2018, 2019) expands this critique, demonstrating that AEF promotes Western cultural norms, consumerist lifestyles, and specific social values. He argues that such representations position

learners within a globalized, Western-oriented identity framework, potentially causing cultural conflict or alienation.

In later work, Derakhshan (2021) adopts a semiotic perspective, showing how the interaction between text, images, and tasks often fails to develop learners' intercultural awareness, leaving cultural meanings superficial. This aligns with Asrif's (2024) argument that modern textbooks prioritize marketability and visual appeal over deeper pedagogical and cultural considerations.

Broader research on EFL materials supports these findings. Farias and Cabezas (2015) reveal that textbooks can impose ideological identities aligned with neoliberal values, particularly in adult education contexts. Alshammri (2017) demonstrates that textbooks may construct simplified or imbalanced representations of foreign cultures, which can negatively affect learner motivation and competence.

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Recent studies continue to highlight issues of cultural representation and identity. Siqueira and Matos (2025) note the persistent dominance of Anglo-American culture in global textbooks, while Hua, Yu, and Chan (2025) show how textbooks can actively construct national and political identities through selective cultural representation. Mohammadzadeh and Zarabi (2025) further illustrate how strong ideological emphasis in textbooks can limit learners' intercultural competence by prioritizing local or religious identities over global perspectives.

Overall, however the literature confirms that EFL/ESL including AEF Series play a significant role in shaping learner identity through their cultural content, pedagogical design, and ideological underpinnings, it portrays two different views on the target learner identity presupposed by

American English File series. Many researchers conclude that while AEF offers effective communicative tools and exposure to global English, it often privileges Western norms and perspectives, which may marginalize local identities or create identity tensions. Nevertheless, there are other researchers who state that AEF portrays desirable cosmopolitan identity which might be adopted and engaged or resisted and disengaged by the learners.

These findings highlight the need for a study to assess the precise quality of negotiation between Western, global and local identities within AEF texts.

Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the presupposed identity constructed for English language learners and activities performed by the American English File (AEF) series. This research is informed by the pedagogical experience of one of the authors in delivering the AEF curriculum. Contrary to the common critique that such textbooks serve as mere vehicles for Western ideological hegemony (Derakhshan, 2018; Litz, 2000), the classroom observations suggest a more complex negotiation. We have noted that the series does not purely transcend "American" or "Western" identity, instead it presents a hybrid, globalised tourist persona that does not always align with traditional Western tropes. This observation suggests that the "ideal student" in AEF may be a more fluid, cosmopolitan and sometimes superficial construct than the three trends found in the literature admit.

Drawing on James Paul Gee's (2018) model of Discourse Analysis, specifically the building tasks of Identity and Significance, this research seeks to uncover the precise "Recipient Design" of the series. It aims to bridge the gaps among the "Western-centric", "Cosmopolitan" and

“Tourist”views by providing discourse-level evidence of how these identities are linguistically designed. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Identify the specific social positions (e.g., the global citizen, the digital nomad, or the transcultural communicator, etc.) that the AEF series invites learners to inhabit, moving beyond a binary "Western vs. Local" framework.
2. Determine how the text negotiates the tension between Anglo-American linguistic standards and the multi-ethnic, globalised or superficial tourist social worlds depicted in its themes.
3. Analyze the types of activities that the texts perform through the foregrounded identities within the texts.

By applying Gee's (2004, 2018) framework to these lived classroom observations, this study aims to reveal the "ideal recipient" envisioned by and the “activities” performed by AEF series—a performer who may represent a new, de-territorialised identity in the 21st-century EFL landscape. This means that the article also seeks the speech acts that the texts perform.

Research questions

This research aims to illustrate how the textbook *American English File 3* (third edition) assumes the identity of its readers and what activities do the texts perform through the foregrounded identities. To achieve this, the following questions are addressed:

1. What identities do the texts of AEF(Vol. 3) portray for the readers?
2. What actions do the texts perform?

3. What are the highlighted and marginalized social goods and discourses of the texts?

Method

Design of the study

A qualitative research approach was employed to find the highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses. To enhance the credibility of the qualitative analysis, the interpretations and categorizations presented in the tables were reviewed in consultation with a second rater. The second rater independently examined the data and expressed findings. Inter-rated reliability was assessed using percent agreement method, which reached 92%, indicating a high level of agreement between the two raters. Any differences in interpretation were discussed and resolved to reach shared and credible conclusions.

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Corpus

To evaluate the textbook's recipient design, 10 texts from *American English File 3* (Intermediate), third edition – 5 listening and 5 reading – were selected. The reading texts were sourced from lessons 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9, while the listening texts came from lessons 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10. Each lesson has two parts A and B, and to ensure content diversity, if a reading text was taken from part A, like 1A, the next reading text was chosen from part B, like 3B. The intermediate level was chosen because this is the level that more students are likely to reach. Table 1 lists the title, sentence count, word count, page, and unit of each selected text.

Table 1. Information about the selected texts

type of text	unit	page	title	number of words	number of sentences
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reading	A1	7	Eat and drink – but at the right time	463	40
reading	3B	30	Common stereotypes about men and women - but are they really true?	495	55
reading	5A	47	Do Lucky Socks Really Work	307	36
reading	7B	70	Things you know if you still live with your parents'	327	43
reading	9A	88	How to Improve Your luck and Win the Lottery Twice (Possibly)	520	73
listening	2B	20	Changing Lives	896	108
listening	4A	39	without title (about social manners)	757	109
reading and listening	6B	63	Can you learn how to be charismatic?	628	74
listening	8A	79	Dragon's Den	1014	120
Listening	10B	101	without title (about Jack the Ripper)	814	86

Theoretical Foundation and Procedure

The concept of 'recipient design' proposed by Gee (2018) was applied as the theoretical framework of the present study. Gee's model was applied because it particularly addresses the fact that how texts/discourses are designed to influence a particular group of audiences'/ readers' interpretations and interactions. The concept of recipient design, as one of the tools in discourse analysis, is somehow a unique tool which is not directly addressed in other discourse analysis

models. As Gee explains “recipient design is active designed work intended to guide the listener or reader to read and respond in certain ways. In the act, we may gain fuel to become something new and to think new thoughts and do new things” (Gee 2018, 136).

Gee’s scheme is based on the idea that ‘language builds the world’, so discourse analysis is analyzing the representation of the world in language and uncovering the truth (Davari Ardakani 2016). According to Gee’s discourse analysis, some key components of a discourse are its constituent identities, actions/activities, social goods and Discourses (Ansarian et al. 2019). Identity, as Gee (2000, 99) defines, is “being recognized as a certain kind of person in a given context”. Gee (2011, 98) explains “when we look at something as an action, we are focused on what is being done. ... Activities usually involve a set of actions and ways of sequencing and combining them that are normed by a given institution, culture, or some socially recognizable group.” For example, the activity of painting is usually done by identities whom we call painters. Gee(2014, 32-35) emphasizes that language is not merely a vehicle for conveying information, but a tool for action and the performance of social practices. According to him, every piece of discourse—including the texts and tasks found in a textbook—functions to do something in the world, such as building relationships, establishing or deconstructing social status, or creating a sense of what is "significant." A text performs an action by inviting the reader to engage in a specific "language game," where the words used are inextricably linked to social activities and identities. In the context of a textbook like American English File, the "action" of the text is not just teaching grammar; it is the discursive act of positioning the learner to perform as a specific type of social actor(identity)—whether that be a consumer, a traveler, or a professional—thereby making certain ways of being and acting in the world available or desirable to the student. By social goods, he means “anything that the society or a Discourse takes as a good, valuable or

necessary thing to have” (Gee 2018, 144). Discourses “are ways to enact socially meaningful identities, using language and other stuff ... often in specific sorts of places and sometimes at specific times” (Gee 2018, 145). In the present study, the above elements were identified in the selected texts to capture the writer’s points of view. Then a table was designed for each text to draw a clearer and more reliable recipient design, including represented identity for the reader, speech acts of the texts and the assumed response from the reader.

Gee (2018) sees discourse analysis as “reverse engineering” of a text and poses 12 questions, as the tools of discourse analysis, aimed at creating a comprehensive understanding of the targeted discourse. Three of these questions which help to capture the image of “recipient design” were selected to be answered:

- a. How does the author construe, support, or advocate the way social goods are distributed?
- b. What Discourses are at work and in what ways?
- c. How has the language been designed to invite or guide the recipients to interpret and respond in certain ways?

The analysis of the selected texts involved several steps:

- a. Determining identities, their actions and states in the texts;
- b. Counting occurrences of each action, state and identity and determining the percentage of each occurrence considering the number of words associated with them;
- c. Determining text topics, their frequency and the percentage of their occurrence considering the number of sentences associated with them;
- d. Identifying highlighted and marginalized social goods and discourses;
- e. Identifying the main action(s) performed by the texts;

- f. Identifying presumed reader identities, considering social class, beliefs, and educational background;
- g. Assessing the potential impact of the texts on readers.

Results

Answer to the research questions

Question 1: What identities do the texts of AEF(Vol. 3) portray for the readers?

Answer to Q 1: The research shows that the presupposed identities of the textbook's audiences are young, ambitious, super busy and hard-working yet sympathetic people who rely on science and research, seek confidence, charisma and success, believe in gender stereotypes, superstitions and luck. The text assumes that they are most probably incapable of balancing their family relationships and hence they need communication, career and financial advice. Nevertheless, they are portrayed as being curious enough to be interested in revealing past uncovered criminal mysteries.

Question 2: What actions do the texts perform?

Answer to Q 2: The actions that the texts perform include persuading, consolidating, justifying superstitions, appreciating parents, encouraging positive thinking in order to be lucky, advocating and promoting social activism, teaching charisma, motivating business establishment all through reference to scientific research. The last action that is performed is acknowledging human curiousness by seeking mysteries. Nevertheless, it can be said that the macro-action that the texts perform are educating the audience, especially regarding maintaining their health, obtaining success, balancing relationships all by relying on scientific studies.

Question 3: What are the highlighted and marginalized social goods and discourses of the texts?

Answer to Q 3: The highlighted social goods are welfare (education and health-which is brought through natural life style and body cycle), science, scientific research and universities, success, self-confidence, gender-based capabilities, parents(with a focus on their financial favors), family relationships (including etiquettes), therapeutic consultation, luck, positive thinking, country development, charisma and extrovert character, self-established business, truth, social mysteries.

Accordingly, the foregrounded discourses of the texts are “ physical health as happiness”, “health as performing daily activities(including eating) at the right time”, “science as ideology”, “ dominance of urban life”, “gendered capabilities”, “validity of superstitions”, “parents as adult children supporters”, “luck and positive psychology”, “ supporting under-developed countries by individuals in developed countries through charity services”, “therapeutic consultation for verbal and behavioral communicative balance(emphasis on teachability of charisma)”, “ business establishment as a cornerstone of individual independence” and “legitimizing curiosity for uncovering the past criminal mysteries”.

As is discussed in the next section, the foregrounded social goods and discourses in the texts (tables 2, 4, 6, 8 & 10) encourages the reader to have an outward and success-oriented approach into life issues instead of a society-oriented, internal and emotional approach. At the same time, no value is given to relying on intuition and personal understanding on issues, while relying on experts is propagated as a major solution for problems.

Discussion

An introduction of each text is given in this section. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and discourses, the presupposed identities of the learners and the actions performed by the texts are extracted. Examples of the texts are given in appendix 1 to 10.

Introduction to the Content of the Texts

Text 1: Eat and drink – but at the right time

This reading text explains how science suggests that we can be healthier and happier by doing daily activities at the right time, especially eating and drinking. Health is the dominant topic in the text. However, the text explains about the correct time of eating, it does NOT mention anything about the quality of the food we eat. The introduction represents super-busy 21st-century lifestyles. Despite the fact that achieving happiness is considered as a presupposed goal for the text audience, “happiness” seems to be reduced to “physical health”. Additionally, the text advocates health requirements of adopting a natural lifestyle and respecting our body cycle. Table 2 outlines the highlighted and marginalized social goods and discourses in text 1.

Table 2. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 1

	Highlighted	Marginalized
Social goods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health 2. Scientific research 3. Natural life style 4. body cycle 	Quality of food and exercise
Discourses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Happiness is health 2. Science as ideology 3. Dominance of urban lifestyle 4. Importance of doing things in the right time 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Importance of the other qualities of activities(besides correct timing) 2. Importance of other elements of happiness

Accordingly, assumed identities for the text audience and the actions the text perform is outlined in the following table.

Table 3. Recipient design in text 1

Assumed identity for the reader/recipient pattern	1. Urbanized super-busy and hardworking person in 21 st century 2. Believer of the validity of science
Action of the text	Persuading and convincing
Assumed action done by the reader (after reading)	Eating and drinking in the right time for being healthy

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Using imperative, indicative and declarative moods along with multiple references to scientific research clearly demonstrates the persuasive tone of the text (See examples in appendix 1).

Text 2: Common stereotypes about men and women - but are they really true?

Text 2 is about gender stereotypes which in AEF series view are scientifically proved. From recurrent references to academic research to prove certain stereotypes, it may be concluded that this text is trying to promote gender-based discourses through research evidence. In the final paragraph there is a mention of a few gender stereotypes which are not yet verified and hence assessed as marginalized. Emphasizing on gender-based differences especially by referring to research findings can be considered as a type of marginalizing gender equality and academic skepticism on stereotypes. The highlighted and marginalized social goods and discourses are shown in tables 4.

Table 4. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 2

	Highlighted	Marginalized
Social goods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Science 2. University 3. Gender-based abilities 	Gender equality
Discourses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Validity of science 2. Gender confrontation 3. Gender-based generalizations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic skepticism on stereotypes 2. Gender equality 3. LGBT community

The heading “women talk more than men” is a biased statement against women, as it is sociolinguistically proved that the length of male and female talk depends on many contextual factors including the topic. The statement is also pejorative as the referenced research is one that has been carried out on baby rats and not on humans and it is concluded that both rats and women who make more noise have more FOXP2 – a protein necessary for the development of speech and language- women's talk is considered as mice’s “noise making” which is clearly a case of humiliation of women. The assumed audience identity and performance and the text actions are outlined in table 5.

Table 5. Recipient design in text 2

Assumed identity for the reader	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Believer of validity of science 2. Believer of gender stereotypical generalization
Action of the text (speech act)	Science/Research as ideology
Assumed action done by the reader (after reading)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submission to science 2. Submission to gender discrimination in favor of men

In showing the correctness of the stereotype that “women are more caring than men”, the text explains that this “does not mean that men are not caring, it only shows they are not emotional when it comes to their partner’s feelings” (Latham-Koenig et al. 2020, 30). This can be seen as backgrounding men’s weak performance on the test carried out in the research. Therefore, a mild type of sexism in favor of men is seen(See examples in appendix 2).

Text 3: Do lucky socks really work?

Text 3 is about superstitious beliefs and behaviors in the context of sports and whether they affect the outcome of matches. Mentions of very successful athletes who practice their superstitious beliefs, could be considered as normalizing superstitions. Especially, where some paragraphs discuss the benefits of superstitious beliefs according to scientific research and experts’ opinions. As was said before, referring to scientific researches and experts’ opinion is a way of convincing the reader that superstitions are advantageous. Only the last paragraph discusses the disadvantages of superstitious beliefs without referring to any approving reference. In sum, the text considers superstitious beliefs and behaviors leading to self-confidence building which ultimately could lead to success. However, the other side of the coin is marginalization of the effect of professional competence/expertise on a person’s confidence and success. It hence marginalizes logical thinking and its effect on one’s achievements(Table 6).

Table 6. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 3

	Highlighted	Marginalized
Social goods	1. Science 2. Success 3. Self-confidence	1. Professional expertise 2. Common sense

Discourses	1. Legitimacy of superstitions 2. Science in favor of superstitions	1. Logical thinking 2. Science contradicting superstitions
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The recipient design of text 3 which is shown in table 7 portrays the text’s audience as ambitious success oriented people who need to be persuaded to believe in superstitions through presenting them related research reports (See examples in appendix 3).

Table 7. Recipient design in text 3

Assumed identity for the reader	1. Believer of the validity of scientific research 2. Ambitious and success-oriented
Action of the text	Consolidating and justifying superstitions by referring to science
Assumed action done by the reader (after reading)	Performing superstitious actions in order to be successful

Text 4: Things you know if you still live with your parents

The advantages and disadvantages of living with parents are discussed in text 4. By stating that “In the US, 31% of young adults aged 18-34 still live at home with their parents”, the text tries to persuade the its audience that living with parents is a great favor from parents to their adult children. However, the text foregrounds materialistic/financial support provided by parents and there is no mention of emotional support, as if emotional family bonds are trivial. On the other

hand, disadvantages of living with parents is backgrounded. All in all, family financial support is introduced as a social good and youth incompetence seems to be a dominant discourse (tables 8).

Table 8. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 4

	Highlighted	Marginalized
Social goods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family 2. Parents' (financial) support 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial independence 2. Emotional family bonds 3. Youth responsibilities
Discourses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parents' support of their adult children 2. Youth incompetence/naivety 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adult children's emotional needs 2. Family responsibilities 4. Parents' neglect

It is worth noting that there is no mention of the situation of the 70 percent of young people who do not live with their parents. Also, the assumption of the text is that all parents are caring, kind and responsible, and parents who, for any reason, do not financially or emotionally support their adult children are marginalized (See examples in appendix 4).

Table 9. Recipient design in text 4

Assumed identity for the reader	An adult child still dependent on their parents
Action of the text	Admiring parents who financially support their adult children
Assumed action done by the reader (after reading)	Appreciating parents' support and favor

The text addressees are adult dependent children who are addressed through expressions such as "you know this ..." or "you will be forever grateful ..." which sounds prescriptive and the dominant discourse of the text is gratitude towards parents who financially support their adult

children(Table 9).

Text 5: How to improve your luck and win the lottery twice (possibly)?

In the introduction of text 5, the story of a woman is told, who won two lottery tickets in one day. The text suggests that people can determine their own luck (controllability of luck). Then the author describes his research project about luck and his derived principles about lucky and unlucky people. Tables 10 and 11 show types of social goods, Discourses and recipient design of the text.

Table 10. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 5

	Highlighted	Marginalized
Social goods	1. Luck 2. Success 3. Positive thinking	1. logical thinking 2. Competence 3. Concentration
Discourses	1. positive psychology 2. pragmatism 3. controllability of luck 4. intuitions	1. logical thinking 2. efficiency at work 3. Context-dependancy of people’s attitudes 4. luck as a random phenomenon

Table 11 shows that one may improve their luck by being positive, relaxed, confident and listening to their intuitions. Nevertheless, the role of thinking, contemplation and expertise in success have been backgrounded. In addition, the negative and positive impacts of contextual elements such as comfort/discomfort and the effect of level of welfare on people’s attitudes have been sidelined.

Table 11. Recipient design in text 5

Assumed identity for the reader	A determined person who believes in the influence of luck on success
Action of the text	Encouraging positive thinking in order to be lucky through reference to scientific research
Assumed action done by the reader (after reading)	Adopting a positive approach Following one's intuition rather than overthinking

Text 5 tries to persuade the audience to redefine luck as something influencing success by citing the results of an extensive scientific research(See examples in appendix 5).

Text 6: Changing lives

This audio text is about a charity foundation called "Adelante Africa" in Uganda and the story of how it was founded. Picturing the poor conditions of children and local people and the activities of the charity and its support to the poor. It highlights country development, welfare, health and nutrition as social goods from which the local people of Uganda have been deprived. Tourism which is a social good that could directly and indirectly support the local economy and improves people's welfare is marginalized. On the other hand, poverty in Africa seem to be an assumed neutral fact.; the causes of poverty and the fact that small charity aids will not eradicate it are neglected here. Furthermore, there is no mention of the richness of this land - such as natural resources, local customs and capabilities of local people. An outline of highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses are displayed in table 12.

Table 12. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 6

	Highlighted	Marginalized
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Social goods	1. Development 2. welfare (health and education)	1. Social welfare and service 2. Tourism
Discourses	1. Poverty and underdevelopment in Africa 2. Charitable activities done by Westerners	1. Reasons of poverty in Africa 2. Local capabilities

Table 13 shows that the assumed identity for the text audience is one who appreciates Westerners' involvement in charity activities in undeveloped countries and tries to role-model them and act in the same way. Generally speaking, the text is advocating Westerners' charity activities in undeveloped countries.

Table 13. Recipient design in text 6

Assumed identity for the reader	A person who role-models Westerners who perform charity services in undeveloped countries
Action of the text	Advocating Westerners' charity activities in undeveloped countries
Assumed action done by the reader (after reading)	Helping the needy through education and lifestyle change (and not just by providing food or financial aid)

Generally, in this text, the local people are represented as weak while the charity people are represented as passionate and supportive. Therefore, the action of the text can be seen as foregrounding the charity foundations and encouraging the audience to do humanitarian activities

to solve the problems that they were not at all involved in their formation(See examples in appendix 6).

Text 7: Social manners

This listening text is a radio program called "Modern Manners" and is about social etiquette. It considers "maintaining family relationship" to be a social good that is achieved by observing social etiquettes. Moreover, consulting with an expert for solving relationship problems is another dominant theme of the text. As a result, the text admits to a general lack of social skills in most human beings. The highlighted and marginalized social goods and discourses are presented in table 14.

Table 14. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 7

	Highlighted	Marginalized
Social goods	1. Etiquettes 2. Family relationship 3. Consultation	Interpersonal skills
Discourses	1. Social manners 2. Consulting with experts 3. Family interactions	1. Freedom of action 2. Problems-solving skills

The assumed identity portrayed in the text is one who is capable of expressing their feelings through effective verbal interactions. On the other hand, tolerance and intuitive problem-solving and their effects on social relationship balance seem to be backgrounded.

Table 15. Recipient design in text 7

Assumed identity for the reader	A person incapable of balancing family relationship
Action of the text	Educating and advising to seek consultation to learn required social skills
Assumed action done by the reader (after reading)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expressing feelings by effectively using language in interactions 2. Balancing family relationships 3. Getting help from experts

As is seen in table 15, this text performs the act of educating social skills without relying on research findings. It seems that the proposed formulaic solutions ignore the differences among people and the complexities of human relationships(See examples in appendix 7).

Text 8: Can you learn how to be charismatic?

This text is about a report on a charisma coach who “has worked with Microsoft, Yahoo, and the BBC, and he thinks he can turn anyone into George Clooney. He charges \$200 an hour, and plenty of people are paying”. Mentioning George Clooney as a charismatic person and working with big companies are used as ways of convincing the reader that the coach is great at his job, and consequently gain trust of the readers. A reporter, who has attended his course only for two days, explains the tips given by the coach. As is seen in table 16, charisma is considered as a social good which is both learnable and teachable and the fact that in some cases charisma may partially be rooted in the people’s characters such as honesty, kindness, or their competence.

Table 16. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 8

	Highlighted	Marginalized

Social goods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Charisma 2. Self-confidence 3. Social character 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Innate charisma 2. The role of competence and expertise in having a charismatic character 2. The role of one's appearance in having a charismatic character
Discourses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The importance of charisma in social interactions 2. Learnability and teachability of charisma 	Charisma as an innate quality

As is seen in table 17 the assumed identity of the readers in this text is one who is interested in gaining success through their charisma and the performed action of the text is suggesting the teachability of charisma. Accordingly, the assumed action of the readers would be becoming interested in learning how to be charismatic. Despite the indicative aspect of the tips, using declarative aspect such as “the solution is that ...”, or “it is important that ...” and also indirect speech which turns imperative sentences into indicative ones, the text could be considered a prescriptive text(See examples in appendix 8).

Table 17. Recipient design in text 8

Assumed identity for the reader	A person interested in being charismatic in order to be successful
Action of the text	Teaching charisma
Assumed action done by the reader	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning how to to become charismatic 2. Projecting their own personality

Text 9: Dragon's Den

This audio text is the story of two contestants in a TV show. they are young entrepreneurs, product designers or people with new ideas who present their ideas or businesses to a group of investors and ask for funding. Investors will decide whether they invest or not. In this text, owning a business or being self-employed is represented more important than being employed even with a high salary. The importance of capital for establishing a business seems to be ignored. Also, the impact of appearing on a TV show on their visibility in the marketplace has been marginalized. Moreover, nothing is said about the importance of quality of products in a business success. Other social goods and discourses of the text are outlined in table 18. .

Table 18. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 9

	Highlighted	Marginalized
Social goods	1. Self-employment 2. Business 3. Success	1. Working as a staff in a business/institutions 2. Quality of the business products 3. Media outreach 4. Funds
Discourses	1. Establishing a Business vs. working for others 2. Career growth	1. Other-Employment 2. Importance of financial resources

As is seen in table 19 assumed identity of the text reader is one who is seeking career development and financial growth. The text encourages the reader to establish their own business and avoid working for others. Worth noting that the number of indicative sentences is high in this story-like text which makes it a motivational text (See examples in appendix 9).

Table 19. Recipient design in text 9

Assumed identity for the reader	A person seeking career and financial growth
Action of the text	Encouraging the readers to establish their own businesses
Assumed action done by the reader	Establishing their own business by absorbing funds

Text 10: Jack the Ripper

This audio text, entails an interview with a retired detective who discusses the identity of "Jack the Ripper", the mysterious 1888 London murderer who was never identified. The police were unable to identify and catch him. In this more than a century, many historians, writers and detectives tried to uncover the mystery and identify Jack's identity. But it is still a mystery. "Truth" and "finding the truth" and "evidence" for verifying the police findings are among the highlighted social goods of the text and police responsibility and justice are marginalized ones. The main Discourse of the text is the public interest in revealing the truth about past criminal mysteries and this is why the mystery of the murder is represented in a way that is more entertaining and interesting for lay people rather than an incidence that once endangered people's safety, caused fear and took the lives of several women. As is seen in table 20 the responsibility of the police in finding the murderer and the execution of justice have been sidelined.

Table 20. Highlighted and marginalized social goods and Discourses in text 10

	Highlighted	Marginalized
Social goods	1. Truth/revealing criminal mysteries 2. Documents and evidence	1. People's Safety 2. Police's authority and responsibility 3. Practice of justice

Discourses	1. Criminal mystery and Public interest	1. Violence and terror 2. Police inefficiency
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An outline of the text recipient design including the assumed identity of the reader is presented in table 21 and it reflects one who is interested in revealing the past criminal mysteries(See examples in appendix 10).

Table 21. Recipient design in text 10

Assumed identity for the reader	Person interested in finding out about the past criminal mysteries
Action of the text	1. Normalizing the inaccessibility of justice 2. Reducing a past dreadful crime to an interesting lay people amusement story
Assumed action done by the reader	Legitimizing lay people curiosity about past uncovered criminal mysteries

Considering the large number of declarative sentences in the text, the action of the text is mainly reporting news and new opinions about Jack's mystery. By pointing to the inadequacy of the provided evidence, the detective tries to discredit the theories.

Conclusion

Across all ten texts, a consistent discursive pattern emerges: the construction of a learner identity centered on self-improvement, productivity, and reliance on expert knowledge. This identity is not explicitly framed as “Western,” but rather as globally desirable and universally

fashionable. However, this apparent neutrality masks an underlying ideological orientation. The repeated emphasis on individual success, personal responsibility, and scientific validation aligns closely with neoliberal discourses. These discourses position individuals as self-managing agents responsible for optimizing their own lives, while structural, cultural, and emotional dimensions are systematically backgrounded. For example, in Text 4, parental relationships are framed primarily in economic terms, while emotional bonds are minimized. Similarly, in Text 6, charity narratives emphasize Western intervention while marginalizing local agency and structural causes of poverty. Thus, the textbook does not simply reflect reality; it actively constructs a particular version of it—one in which success is individualized, expertise is externalized, and social complexity is simplified.

According to the obtained results, individualism is the most dominant Discourse of the examined texts of American English File 3. The assumed and highlighted components of these texts are often focused on health, success, self-confidence, and financial capabilities. On the other hand, social and cultural aspects of human life seem to be backgrounded. The audience is directed towards self-promotion rather than contributing in promoting the society and creating a better world.

In the discourse of individualism, humans are happy as independent and separate identities in pursuit of personal goals and desires, and the environment and people around them are a means for them to achieve these goals. In this culture thinking about one's own interests rather than the interests of larger groups is advocated. The discourse of individualism is opposed to the discourse of collectivism, in which collective structures such as society, religion, ethnicity, and tradition dominate the individual and his/ her life (Masihi 2020). With this definition, it can be briefly said that the discourse of the reviewed texts in AEF has highlighted many aspects of

individualism(but not all of them) and marginalized many aspects of collectivism(but not all of them).

The other highlighted discourse of the examined textbook is the discourse of referring to experts, in the sense that the correctness or incorrectness of cultural and social propositions should be attested by referring to science, scientific researches and experts in the relevant fields. Through this discourse, it is proposed that science and research are the most reliable means of problem solving. The discourse is clearly dominant even in the discussion of superstitions and success, gender stereotypes, time-oriented lifestyle, the willfulness of luck and the learnability of charisma. Also, seeking advice from an expert on social etiquette and a retired detective in solving a murder mystery are other examples of highlighting the discourse of professionalism/ experticisms. On the other hand, the discourse of trusting one's intuition and people's awareness and their problem-solving abilities in society have been marginalized.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that *American English File 3* constructs a learner identity that aligns with individualism and expert-driven knowledge systems. While previous studies have interpreted this as evidence of Western ideological dominance, the present study argues that the discourse reflects a broader globalized neoliberal framework. This framework prioritizes self-regulation, personal success, and scientific authority, while marginalizing collective values, emotional depth, and structural awareness. Therefore, language textbooks should be critically evaluated not only for their linguistic content but also for their role in shaping learners' identities and worldviews.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Examples of text 1: Eat and drink – but at the right time

Example 1: “science shows that by doing things at the right time we can be happier and healthier”.

Example 2: “... is good for our blood sugar levels”,

Example 3: “... less likely to be at risk of heart disease”,

Example 4: “it stops the body from producing the stress hormone cortisol”.

Example 5: “in our super-busy 21st-century lives, most of us try to do as much as we can in 24 hours. However, we usually do things whenever it suits us, and experts say that this is disrupting our body cycle”.

Example 6: “in a recent study, researchers found ...”,

Example 7: “another research team, from Sweden, suggested that ...”,

Example 8: “according to a study conducted by the University of Sheffield ...”.

Example 9: “The best time to drink coffee is between 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., when it can make us more mentally alert”,

Example 10: “this is when our body digest food best”,

Example 11: “this is when the stomach produces the most acid”, “our sense of smell and taste are at their best at this time”.

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Appendix 2: Examples from Text 2: Common stereotypes about men and women - but are they really true?

Example 1: “Scientists in Norway asked 18 men and women to find their way through a virtual maze. ... Men’s sense of direction was more effective”,

Example 2: “Psychologists at the University of Herefordshire gave 50 male and 50 female students eight minutes to perform three tasks at the same time ... The women, it turned out, easily did all four things at once, but not the men so it seems that this old cliché is true”.

Example 3: “Recent research shows, for example, that women are just as competitive and aggressive as men, better at driving, and no worse at mathematics. Men, on the other hand, are

more insecure in relationships, make worse bosses, and are more likely to panic in stressful conditions”.

Appendix 3: Examples from Text 3: Do lucky socks really work?

Example 1: “Judo star Kayla Harrison always wears the lucky socks.”

Example 2: “Cristiano Ronaldo always steps onto the field with his right foot first.”

Example 3: “tennis legend Serena Williams always bounces the ball five times before a first serve”.

Example 4: “According to a study by the University of Cologne, it seems that they can increase confidence and a sense of control, which might help athletes.”

Example 5: “In another experiment, people who were allowed to carry their lucky charm performed better at memory tests than people without one.”

Example 6: “Dan Abrahams, a sports psychologist, says that sporting rituals can cause the release of adrenaline and other chemicals that help the athlete to focus better”.

Example 7: “Abrahams tells the story of a professional soccer team where two players had the same superstition - they both had to be the last person to leave the locker room before the game. They couldn't agree how to solve the problem, and it had a really negative effect on them and on the team”.

Appendix 4: Examples from Text 4: Things you know if you still live with your parents

Example 1: “on weekends, you wake up to the smell of coffee and pancakes.”

Example 2: “the refrigerator and cupboards always have something in them.”

Example 3: “you have no idea how much bills cost.”

Example 4: “it doesn't matter how old you are, you'll always be a child to them”,

Example 5: “it’s really embarrassing when you meet new people to admit you're still sleeping in your childhood bedroom”,

Example 6: “every day of your life, you hear that you treat this house like a hotel”.

Example 7: “you become the household IT technician. If anything goes wrong in the house to do with phones, internet, or computers, you're called to the rescue”.

Appendix 5: Examples from Text 5: How to improve your luck and win the lottery twice (possibly)?

Example 1: “but is there anything we can all do to increase the chances of being lucky ourselves?”

Example 2: “...not a magical ability, or the result of random chance. Instead, lucky and unlucky people create much of their good and bad luck by the way they think and behave”

Example 3: “Lucky people create and notice opportunities by developing a relaxed attitude to life and being open to change”

Example 4: “Lucky people tend to listen to their intuition and act quickly. Unlucky people tend to analyze situations too much, and are afraid to act”,

Example 5: “Lucky people are confident that the future will be positive”,

Example 6: “Unlucky people are sure that they will fail, and so they often give up before they have begun”.

Appendix 6: Examples from Text 6: Changing lives

Example 1: “It was a school for orphans, the walls were falling down, the blackboards were broken, and there weren't many desks”

Example 2: “to set up a charity to raise money to rebuild the school”,

Example 3: “to build a children's home for the orphans”,

Example 4: “but many of the children were sick. They had malaria or malnutrition. So, we started several small community projects”,

Example 5: “to improve their diet by giving them seeds to plant a variety of vegetables”, Example

6: “building water tanks to collect rainwater so that they have cleaner water to drink”, Example 7:

“we’ve started a small factory to make sunflower oil, which has helped local farmers, and also given some jobs to local people”,

Example 8: “He’s a boy, an orphan, ... He was very bright, he got very good grades and we sponsored him to go to secondary school. He worked very hard and now he’s in the last year of nursing at a good nursing college”.

Appendix 7: Examples from Text 7: Social manners

Example 1: “She’s a nice woman, but one thing she does that I think is really rude is that whenever she comes over for a meal, she criticizes my cooking”,

Example 2: “he just called me saying he's coming next month and he's bringing his new dog. But it's still a puppy and my girlfriend and I aren't very into dogs”,

Example 3: “he just shouts all the time, jumps on the furniture, makes a mess in the kitchen. He even writes on the walls! It's really exhausting, but my sister's very sensitive about me criticizing her son”.

Example 4: “Stay calm, thank her as politely as possible for her advice, and change the subject”,

Example 5: “you should politely but directly say how you feel. You can add a reason, but to be honest, you don't really have to”,

Example 6: “But instead of being critical, say how great it is that their son has so much energy, and how much you love him, but then explain that he has to calm down a little when he's visiting”.

Appendix 8: Examples from Text 8: Can you learn how to be charismatic?

Example 1: “Projecting your own personality is difficult to learn ... talk about yourself enough, but not too much”

Example 2: “People with charisma also feel confident”,

Example 3: “Body language is also important”,

Example 4: “I learn that it's important not to speak too fast or too slowly”.

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Appendix 9: Examples from Text 9: Dragon's Den

Example 1: “- Well, his offer was that he wanted to have our business, and for us to work with him at Jessops. - With a good salary? – Very”,

Example 2: “I mean neither of us were in a position where we could have dropped everything and gone and worked for Jessops full-time. It was completely...it was ridiculous”,

Example 3: “things worked out well for us. Frame Again was successful, and eventually we sold the business this year”.

Appendix 10: Examples from Text 10: Jack the Ripper

Example 1: “People today are still fascinated by the identity of Jack the Ripper”,

Example 2: “People are always interested in unsolved murders”,

Example 3: “But right now it's still a mystery, and people like a good mystery”.

Pre-print Version