

# GAPS

Gesellschaft für Anglophone Postkoloniale Studien/Association for  
Anglophone Postcolonial Studies

## Annual Conference

### Ideology in Postcolonial Texts and Contexts

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University of Münster, Germany

**Bönkost, Jule**, Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany  
(Friday, *Politics and Ideology II*; Panel d, 1; room: ES 227)

## ***RACE* DISCOURSE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS**

In Germany, in English language teaching “intercultural learning” is a central theme that scholars have well explored. How English language teaching relates to *race*, however, has drawn less attention. Research has not yet addressed the racial categorization regularly appearing in present English language textbooks. This reflects a broader neglect of applying *race* as an analytical category in German educational sciences. The inequalities that English as a racialized language reflects and the consequences of English language teaching in Germany in shaping racial identities are largely unexamined. Most German studies that address racism in schoolbooks identify racism as misguided ideological belief that needed to be replaced by an “objective” representation of reality. These analyses fail to grasp the complexity of how *race* operates as a powerful social construction that critical theories of *race* have pointed out.

Building on a theoretical and empirical research project on *race* in 18 current English language textbooks for the secondary education level (Bönkost 2014), this paper argues that within the present German *race* discourse English language textbooks do not hold a neutral position. They form part of the educational system as a powerful institution that regulates and constitutes the formation of subject positions, including processes of racialization. The presented qualitative study, which also uses quantitative research techniques, employs a postcolonial theoretical perspective. Drawing from critical

race theory and critical whiteness studies it uses a critical-deconstructive approach, understanding *race* in schoolbooks as an effect and part of a powerful unjust knowledge regime that pervades language and cannot be avoided by authors (and teachers), no matter what their intentions are. In this paper, following a Foucauldian discourse theoretical perspective, invoking insights of Reiner Keller's "sociology of knowledge approach to discourse", and using methodological devices of Siegfried Jäger's toolbox of Kritische Diskursanalyse, I conceptualize the position of English language textbooks within the German *race* discourse. I discuss the various ways that *race* manifests in present English language textbooks not as "false" ideology but as a discursively reproduced phenomenon. Particularly, this paper will look at the portrayal of white and black Americans, the usage of the term "race", and the application of "intercultural learning" in schoolbooks in order to show how these aspects play a major role in structuring *race* discourse in contemporary German English language textbooks. Moving beyond a binary model of oppression and resistance my paper argues that a critical approach to *race* in English language teaching is a contradictory project with both decolonizing and colonizing effects.

In conclusion, this paper sheds light on the rarely recognized overlap of contemporary United States and German *race* relations as a result of the racialized project of teaching English, in order to propose an understanding and a deconstruction of the German *race* discourse in an interdisciplinary and international context. It emphasizes the contribution that German American Studies have been making to the discussion on *race* and aims to initiate in German educational sciences a critical discourse perspective on *race* in English language teaching that overcomes the theoretical shortcomings of ideology-related thoughts on racism.

## References

Bönkost, Jule (2014): *Zur Konstruktion des Rassediskurses im Englisch-Schulbuch*. INPUTS - Kritische Beiträge zum postkolonialen und transkulturellen Diskurs, Bd. 5. Trier: WVT.