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DECODING CITIZENSHIP IN USCIS NATURALIZATION TEST MATERIALS: A CRITICAL SOCIAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

Abstract:
The US naturalization test and its accompanying multimodal study cards are intended to help potential citizens learn about US history and government as they prepare for the (2007 revised) naturalization test. While the test claims to be a test of civic and cultural literacy (USCIS 2007a, 2007b), the official US Citizenship and Immigration Services' *Civics Flash Cards for the Naturalization Test,* and the naturalization test itself, rely on multiple literacies (content schemata, test literacy, multimodal literacies) which not all test-takers possess. Through an analysis of the semiotic design of the cards, I consider the efficacy of these study materials for fostering a civic disposition in adult refugee-background English language learners with emerging English literacy who have had little-to-no formal schooling and who have had limited exposure to literacy in the contexts in which they previously lived. I argue that although the test aims to be a test of civic and cultural literacy, it is in actuality a test of (multi)literacy that relies foremost on English literacy, including culturally-specific visual designs and test schemata. Drawing attention to the implicit, dominant ideologies expressed in the naturalization test documents, I question the universality of Western content knowledge and referential knowledge, bring to light the implied and institutionally imagined community of immigrant test-takers for whom these multimodal flash cards were created, and investigate phenomena of (dis)citizenship (Pothier & Devlin 2006; Ramanathan 2013) that may arise within refugee-background populations striving to secure US naturalization.

Keywords:
refugee-background adults ◆ social semiotics ◆ multimodality ◆ US naturalization test ◆ L2 adult emergent readers

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Introduction

In April of 2014, during an informal English as a Second Language and English literacy class I lead for adults from refugee backgrounds, I was practicing the questions on the US naturalization test study cards with one of my Lhotshampa students. I asked him, "Who is the Governor of your state now?" Beaming, he replied, "Answers will vary." This was indeed the answer provided on the back of his US naturalization test study card. This interaction served as the impetus for my critical analysis of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) *Civics Flash Cards for the Naturalization Test,* which were designed to "help immigrants learn about US history and government while preparing for the [2007 revised] naturalization test" (USCIS 2012).[1]

The experience with my friend exemplifies distinct difficulties that the test and its accompanying study materials pose for immigrant English-language learners (ELLs[2]) with emerging literacy, and in particular for refugee-background adult ELLs. After being forced to flee their home countries, many adults with refugee backgrounds living in the United States strive not only to earn US citizenship, but also to learn English as an additional language. Many of those who have been resettled in the US are also adult emergent readers (Bigelow & Vinogradov 2011) who are learning English as a second language while simultaneously learning to read and write for the first time. Unlike their school-aged counterparts, their access to educational opportunities in the United States is typically restricted to a selection of community language and literacy programs.

In this article, I examine the visual design and linguistic structures of the official USCIS *Civics Flash Cards for the Naturalization Test*. My research considers the efficacy of these study materials in fostering a civic disposition in refugee-background adults with emerging English literacy who have had little-to-no formal schooling. I examine the implicit ideologies expressed in these naturalization test documents by highlighting the implied and institutionally-imagined community of immigrant test-takers for whom this multimodal text was created, and I investigate phenomena of citizenship and (dis)citizenship as they are constructed through the testing materials (Pothier & Devlin 2006; Ramanathan 2013). Drawing from analytical frameworks of multimodal social semiotics (Halliday 1978, 1985; Halliday & Martin 1981; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Hodge & Kress 1988; Kress & van Leeuwen 2006), and Critical

Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1992, 1995, 2001, 2003; Fairclough & Wodak 1997), I ask the following questions:

1. How are the multimodal messages being constructed semiotically?
2. How do the images relate to the linguistic content of each flash card?

The Revised US Naturalization Test

In 2007, after seven years of development and consultations with United States history and government scholars, assessment contractors, and English as a Second Language (ESL) experts (see Laglagaron & Devani 2008 for more information about who these stakeholders are), USCIS introduced a new naturalization test, which was to be more "fair and meaningful" than the previous naturalization test (USCIS 2007a).[3] The ESL experts deemed the English language level of the revised test "consistent with Department of Education reporting levels for adult basic education" and that all the questions were asked at the "high-beginning" (USCIS 2007a, 2007b) or A2 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level.[4] Furthermore, the previous test had relied on traditional assessment tools, such as multiple-choice questions, which, as Da Mota (2003) notes, are "not conducive to adult learning methods" (15). Additionally, Da Mota argues that a large proportion of immigrants have had poor educational opportunities, and [because of this] "US naturalization will become merely a prize for the well-educated" (15–17). According to USCIS, the new test was more meaningful because it focuses less on "redundant and trivial questions based on rote memorization" of decontextualized facts, instead focusing on "the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" and "encourag[ing] citizenship applicants to learn and identify with the basic values that we all share as Americans" (USCIS 2007a). The accompanying official study materials also provide additional accepted answers to help immigrants learn more about a topic (USCIS 2007b). The revised test and supplementary materials, therefore, aim to develop knowledge of civic participation and to enhance cultural understanding while preparing users to pass the test.

In spite of these efforts, the new test has been met with criticism. Kunnan, a language assessment expert, concluded that the revised US naturalization test is "unmeaningful and indefensible" (2009: 94). This conclusion was based on his application of the Test Context Framework (Kunnan 2008), which is a thorough examination of the political, legal, economic, and social context and consequences of a test. The revised test was declared "unmeaningful" because, as Kunnan notes, though it was intended to ask questions that involved critical thinking skills, there was not a noticeable difference between the original test's questions and the revised test's questions; the majority of the questions still tested the memorization of facts.

Furthermore, Kunnan remarks that the test is "indefensible" because the critical thinking responses concerning the US government and US history "would be beyond the level of English expected in the test" (2009: 94). It should be noted that Kurvers and van de Craats (2007) have shown that mastery of reading, writing, listening, and speaking is rare for L2 adult emergent readers, and that only a small number of participants from this population reach the CEFR A2 level (54). Accordingly, Kunnan deems the test to be no more than a redesigned test of English literacy skills similar to the one put in place in the late 19th/ early 20th century (2009: 95).

Kunnan's observation that the materials assume levels of English and epistemic knowledge that would not necessarily be available to many who have migrated or been resettled in the US matters given the cards' intended use. Generally, the study cards are concerned with civics, American values, American citizenship, and geography. The vocabulary is related to civics, and famous historical figures, politicians, and events feature predominantly in the questions. This content is exemplified in questions like Question 49, "What is one responsibility that is only for United States citizens?" (serve on a jury; vote in a federal election), and Question 77, "What did Susan B. Anthony do?" (fought for women's rights; fought for civil rights).

Although the cards can be used for classroom-based test preparation, they are primarily envisioned as materials for self-study. In an instructional context, a teacher could guide the students' understanding of the multimodal elements used in conjunction with the factual information presented on the cards; however, their intended use for self-study relies on an assumption of educational backgrounds and literacy that adult emergent readers from refugee backgrounds may not possess. Thus, a potential test-taker with emerging literacy and perhaps also emerging test literacy could easily assume the printed answer on the card, such as "Answers will vary," is an acceptable response.

It is also feasible that an individual could simply memorize the test questions and answers and consequently pass the test without gaining any new understandings of American civic society; however, previous studies on passing rates for both refugee-background adults and for L2 adult emergent readers have shown that these populations had lower passing rates than other non-refugee applicants and applicants with higher literacy skills (American Institutes for Research 2006; see also Chenoweth & Burdick 2007, and Laglagaron & Devani 2008). Because the development of a deeper understanding of American civic life seems to be incidental rather than designed into the study materials, Kunnan's critique suggests a discrepancy between the test's stated goals (testing English language and literacy) and its implicit goals (sanctioning an exclusionary ideology). Even for those who pass the test, the notion of citizenship that is

rendered through the multimodal meanings encoded in these cards thus might be discouraging and disempowering for test-takers who are positioned to recite rather than engage with core ideals of American society, with the possible effect of further excluding them from participation in these social and political discourses.

This study follows Kunnan's lead by undertaking a careful semiotic analysis of the cards to consider the multiple literacies that would be needed to understand and interpret the civic ideals put forth in the test and its accompanying official study materials. Although the official study materials provided by USCIS use multimodality in an attempt to convey cultural values and civics to immigrants, there is a discrepancy between the official study materials and the actual assessment on the naturalization test; this discrepancy potentially makes the cards and test seem even more foreign and incomprehensible. In this article, it will be argued that this has implications not only for the success of the test-takers, but for the purported civic intentions of the test, which may in actuality result in greater feelings of marginalization and (dis)citizenship for adult emergent readers from refugee backgrounds who do not possess the literacies assumed by the test and its related study materials—in particular, by the civics flash cards.

Textual Design of the Card Set

As mentioned above, the flash cards are meant for self-study. Both the question faces and answer faces of these official study cards (henceforth referred to as "Face A" and "Face B," respectively) have print and / or images on them; the text of the cards reflects declarative knowledge written in question and answer format. The images are in color, or black and white, depending on the age of the image; this implies an attempt by the USCIS materials creators to display accurate, historical images representative of the respective time period. It is assumed that the printed questions, answers, and images on these flash cards are meant to work in concert, multimodally, to provide meaning to the immigrant test-taker.

All 100 cards have an adjacency pair of a question and an answer. For some refugee-background test-takers with emergent literacy, the idea of an adjacency pair as being part of study materials may be a new aspect of "doing school" (Harris 2010), one that adult emergent readers would need to learn. Additionally, an adjacency pair in the written modality would be difficult for an adult emergent reader to recognize, because an adult emergent reader needs to learn the punctuation used to delineate the question and the answer, specifically the "?" and the ".". The recognition of these marks, in conjunction with the format of a question and an answer on a set of cards that are to be used for self-study, is a type of literacy that an adult emergent reader with

no or limited past educational experience would need to learn. The use of such structures displays the test designer's belief that immigrants studying to become US citizens come prepared with such literacies.

The textual metafunction of the cards allows different configurations of multimodal elements to represent different meanings. This conventional metafunction involves information value, salience, and framing (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 177). In their hypothesis, information value is determined by the positioning of texts and images 1) left and right, or Given and New, where the information (whether it is written text or image) on the left of a page is considered the Given, and the information on the right is considered the New (2006: 179); 2) top and bottom, or Ideal and Real, where the written text or image at the top is the Ideal, or the generalized essence of information, and the written text or image on the bottom is the Real, or the practical, specific information (2006: 186–187); and 3) center and margin where the information in the center is more important than the information along the edges (2006: 196). Notably, the Given / New and Ideal / Real information value organization is specific to Western cultures, as it mirrors Western conventions of writing (left to right, top to bottom). Salience, on the other hand, is marked by visual weight: size, sharpness, contrast, perspective, and layout (ibid.: 202). Finally, framing serves to join or separate the elements of a multimodal text; in other words, framing emphasizes connection or disconnection (2006: 203–204).

The layout of every Face A is the same, with the number of the question and a partial image of the Statue of Liberty serving as the Given, and the question itself serving as the New. The typography on Face A is mostly consistent, as the question is always made salient through bolding and size in relation to other typed words on the cards; however, different aspects of the question sometimes gain salience through underlining, as seen in Figure 1 below. The underlining of one word occurs when the question requires a particular number of responses for completion (one, two, or three responses in total), as seen in Figure 2. The underlining on Face A emphasizes the quantity of answers expected, but not the content. For ELLs with emerging literacy who are aware of the meaning of this semiotic resource, the underlining may cause them to focus on just the required number of answers. While it is assumed these immigrants would pass the test easier by memorizing only such answers, if that is the case then it can also be assumed they are not learning the other answers, which would affect how many "American ideals" and "civic values" they are learning as they prepare for the naturalization test. Conversely, those who do not understand the salience of the underlined word may attempt to memorize all the answers provided on the back of the study card, but there is no guarantee that

they would understand and comprehend the meaning of the words they are memorizing, and the relationship of those words to American civic values.

There is no consistency in layout or typography of Face B. The study cards vary from utilizing an image as the Given and the printed answer(s) as the New as seen in Figure 2, or vice versa as seen in Figure 3, and presenting an image as the Ideal and the printed answer(s) as the Real as seen in Figure 4, or vice-versa, as shown in Figure 5.

FIGURE 1: Face A of Question 6.

FIGURE 2: Face B of Question 6. Answer: "speech, religion, assembly, press, petition the government".

FIGURE 3: Face B of Question 69. "Who is the 'Father of our country'?" Answer: "(George) Washington".

FIGURE 4: Face B of Question 27. Question: "In what month do we vote for President?" Answer: "November".

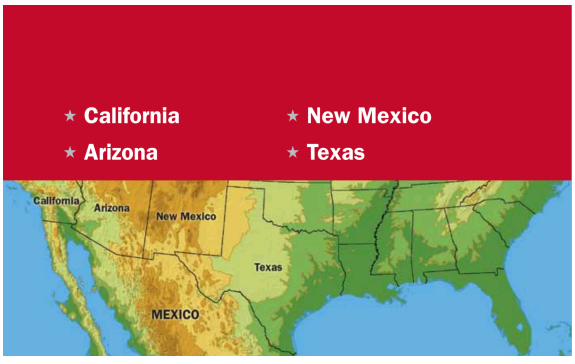

FIGURE 5. Face B of Question 93.
Question: "Name one state that borders Mexico."
Answer: "California; New Mexico; Arizona; Texas".

When questions have only one possible answer, the question is printed on Face B with no bullet point, dash, or capitalization. However, when there are numerous answers that would suffice, each possible recommended answer is marked with a small grey star serving as a bullet point, as seen in Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5. The star-shaped bullet could be indicative of the stars on the American flag, an embedding of "American" images as a means of further instilling American visual culture, yet it is unclear if emergent readers would notice this symbol, or be more concerned with learning the answer to the question. For adult emergent readers with emerging visual literacy, these subtle reminders of "American-ness" may have no noticeable effect on their perceptions of American culture and American citizenship.

Figures 4 and 5 exemplify Face B's that have no captions, whereas Figure 3 shows a Face B with a caption. The captions on the Face B's provide additional information about the image on the study card, but not additional information about the answer itself. The small font makes the captions less salient than the answers printed above in a larger font; this lesser salience may not be understood by the adult emergent reader.

Visual Designs

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) categorize ideational visual structures as narrative or conceptual (Table 1 below). The narrative representations are concerned with actions and events, processes of change, and spatial arrangements; they tell a story through visual design. Narrative representations are composed of Actors, Vectors, Goals, Reactors, and / or Phenomena. In a transactional action process, the Actor is connected to its Goal via a Vector; the Vector emanates from the Actor to the Goal. In a transactional event process, the Actor is anonymous, and only a Vector is shown directed toward the Goal. A non-transactional action image, on the other hand, does not have a Goal, but only an Actor and a Vector. Finally, a reactional process is composed of a Reactor (a secondary Actor), the Reactor's Vector, and / or the Phenomena (the Reactor's Goal); much like action processes, reactional processes can be transactional or non-transactional (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 74–75).

In contrast to the narrative images, conceptual images do not tell a story, but instead serve to define or represent the "stable or timeless essence" of a participant (2006: 50, 79); thus, they show what something is. Conceptual images can be classificational, analytical, or symbolic. Analytical processes are composed of Carriers and Possessive Attributes, where the participants are related in terms of a "part-whole" structure. Possessive attributes (the parts) are used to visually describe the Carrier (the whole); the attributes qualify the whole (2006: 87). Finally,

symbolic processes represent "what a participant *means* or *is*" by means of a Carrier and / or a Symbolic Attribute (2006: 105). Symbolic processes tend to be non-narrative and non-transactional. It is important to note that analytical and symbolic processes can be embedded within transactional and non-transactional narrative processes, and that symbolic processes can be embedded in analytical processes. In this way, visual representations of participants can be multilayered.

TABLE 1: Ideational Metafunction in Kress & van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (2006).

Narrative Representations			**Conceptual Representations**	
Transactional Image	*Action*: Actor, Vector, Goal	*Event*: Vector, Goal	**Classificational**	Subordinate, Superordinate
Non-transactional Image	Actor, Vector		**Analytical**	Carrier, Possessive Attribute
Reactional Image	Reactor (secondary Actor), Vector, Phenomena (Reactor's Vector + Goal)		**Symbolic**	Carrier, Symbolic Attribute

Narrative Images

The USCIS study cards often feature narrative images, which depict either recent or historical events or processes in US civic society. Figure 6 is a narrative action transactional process; the man is the Actor, his gaze and the angle of the pen in his hand are both Vectors, and the paper is the Goal. The picture is read as "the man looks at / signs the paper."

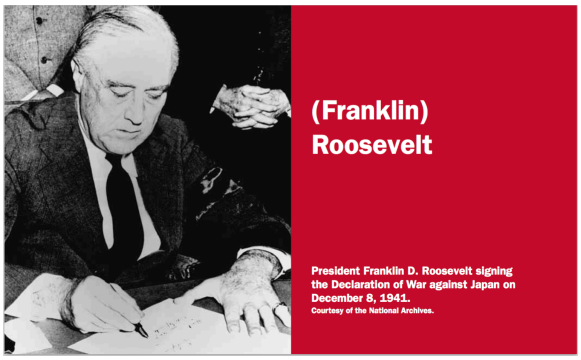

FIGURE 6: Face B of Question 80. Question: "Who was President during the Great Depressions and World War II?" Answer: "(Franklin) Roosevelt". Caption: "President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the Declaration of War against Japan on December 8, 1941."

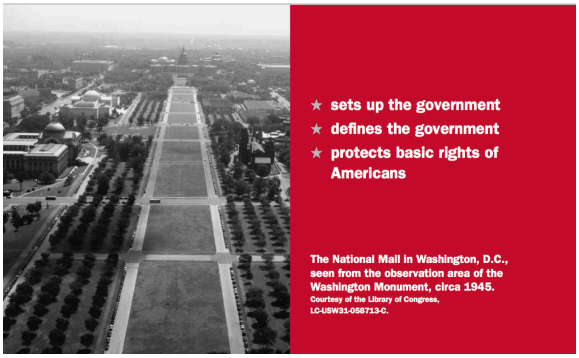

FIGURE 7: Face B of Question 2. Question: "What does the Constitution do?" Answer: "sets up the government; defines the government; protects basic rights of Americans". Caption: "The National Mall in Washington, D.C., seen from the observation area of the Washington Monument, circa 1945."

Figure 7 is a narrative event transactional process where the Vector leads to a Goal, but there is no Actor, and the viewer of the image does not know who or what the Actor is. In this image, the expansive lawn (the Vector) leads to a large building (the Goal) in the distance; the image is thus read as "a large open space leads the way or points to a large building." In contrast, Figure 8 is a narrative non-transactional process where the man is the Actor, his gaze is the Vector, and the Goal is unknown. The viewer / reader of this image is unable to know for certain what the Actor is looking at; instead, the viewer can only surmise what the Goal is. The image is read as "A man looks at something."

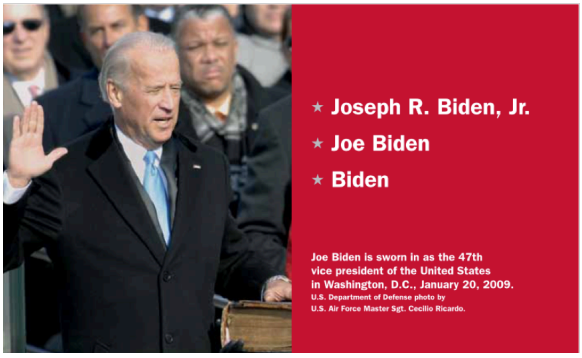

FIGURE 8: Face B of Question 29. Question: "What is the name of the Vice President of the United States now?" Answer: "Joseph R. Biden, Jr.; Joe Biden; Biden". Caption: "Joe Biden is sworn in as the 47th vice president of the United States in Washington, D.C., January 20, 2009."

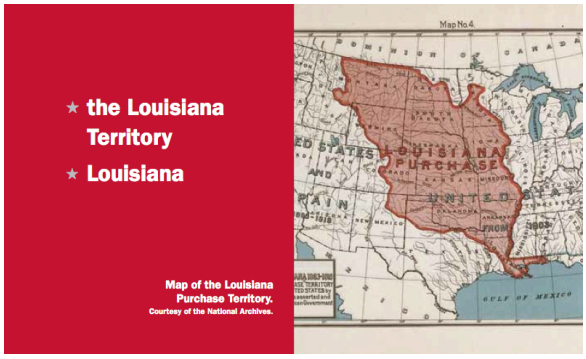

FIGURE 9. Face B of Question 71. Question: "What territory did the United States buy from France in 1803?" Answer: "the Louisiana Territory; Louisiana". Caption: "Map of the Louisiana Purchase Territory."

The use of narrative images suggests the creators of these study materials intended for the images to tell stories about American history, culture, and values to the readers of this text. The stories told, however, as analyzed through Kress and van Leeuwen's framework, are clear mostly for people from a Western culture, and specifically from American culture. For example, returning to Figure 7, the image relies not only on a narrative composition typical in English-language visual cultures, but also on US background knowledge. Specifically, this is seen in the choice of the image. The text's designers elected to show the Capitol Building from a distance rather than up close; the long stretch of grass leading up to the focal building in the background serves to highlight the power and importance of that building. This meaning is embedded in literacy norms, where importance is associated with space and length; furthermore, this is compounded by the viewer's background knowledge that the building at the end is the seat of the United States government. Such a reading of the image may not be accessible to a person from outside Western culture, and more specifically from outside US culture, who may not have had the symbolism of the Capitol Building, and all the power it contains, ingrained in them from a young age. The readability of these narrative stories is therefore dependent on viewers being (multi)literate in Western visual images, and referential background and content schemata.

Conceptual Images

Conceptual images are also shown on the study cards. For example, Figure 9 is an analytical process where the Carrier is the United States of America, and the Possessive Attribute is the Louisiana Purchase. The image says, "The Louisiana Purchase is part of the United States of America." The map of the Louisiana Purchase in Figure 9 may be difficult for immigrants with emerging literacy to read or understand the importance of; it could appear to them as a pinkish, irregularly-shaped blob with lines running through it, and they may not associate it with the United States. This could be further confusing since the segment of the map does not show the entire United States, and therefore relies on the immigrant's knowledge of the geography of the United States to make meaning from the abstract image. The argument could be made that the printed question and answers may prohibit the incorrect interpretation of the image; yet, as with the narrative representations, there is a reliance on background knowledge for the correct interpretation to occur.

Interpersonal Structures

Suvarierol (2012) states that official citizenship packages tend to present an overarching national identity where the image of the nation and migrant are frozen, and where the migrant is invited into a one-way relationship with little creative power to shape the nation. Ideologically, this freezing is a means of political control by the governmental powers to force immigrants to assimilate rather than acculturate, to ignore diversity and celebrate homogenous entities, and to implicitly close the national community (Suvarierol 2012). Keeping in mind this notion of a fixed national identity, and utilizing Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics interpersonal metafunction, we can see how political control is evidenced in the interpersonal, social relationships produced in citizenship texts.

The interpersonal metafunction of the card set creates social relationships linguistically (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 61) through degree of formality, pronouns, and clausal moods (e.g., imperative, interrogative, declarative) (Halliday & Martin 1981; Kramsch 1993). By exploring the interpersonal metafunction linguistically, we can see the degree of distance or intimacy between the reader and the writer (Halliday 1978), and how readers can be positioned and repositioned (Martin 1995). Inscribed or evoked judgment can also shed light on the interpersonal social relationship created by the writer of a text, and show how a reader can be positioned by this relationship (Martin 1995). Ideologically, "one reading can be promoted at the expense of the others"; that promotion can affect groups of readers and potentially promote marginalization on the part of minority groups (Martin 1995: 28).

The interpersonal relationships constructed linguistically between the USCIS (the writer) and the immigrant test-taker (the reader) vary greatly in these study cards and are seen in the clausal mood and pronomial constructions, as well as in evaluative judgment. Imperatives on Face A, as seen below in Example 1 with the imperative "name," serve to distance the immigrant from the test creator and put the immigrant in a lower position of power than that of the test creator.

EXAMPLE 1: Question 73.

Question:	"Name the US war between the North and the South."
Answer:	"the Civil War; the War between the States".

However, in questions like Example 2, through the use of the word "we," the immigrant is inclusively positioned in the same realm as that of the test creator. Here a relationship has been created between the implied addressee and the test creator as if the test-taker has already earned his citizenship and is able to vote in an election in the same manner as the test creator.

EXAMPLE 2: Question 22.

Question: "We elect a US Representative for how many years?"

Answer: "two (2)".

In contrast to Example 2, the positioning seen in Example 3 is different. Example 3 positions the immigrant individually, outside of the population of the test creators. The attempt of this positioning may be to teach the immigrant that there are various US representatives throughout the United States; by explicitly stating "your," the test creators hope to teach the immigrants about their own states. This example, however, does not address the immigrant test-taker as a potential "citizen", but instead as only a "resident" of a state.

EXAMPLE 3: Question 23.

Question: "Name your US Representative."

Answer: "Answers will vary." [Residents of territories with nonvoting Delegates or Resident Commissioners may provide the name of that Delegate or Commissioner. Also acceptable is any statement that the territory has no (voting) Representatives in Congress.]"

Judgment is present within the questions asked on the revised USCIS naturalization test; these evaluations serve to position the immigrants as well. Because the revised naturalization test aims to teach American cultural values, the majority of its questions possess evoked positive judgment declaring the greatness of the United States, as seen in Example 4.

EXAMPLE 4: Question 2.

Question: "What does the Constitution do?"

Answer: "sets up the government; defines the government; protects basic rights of Americans".

At first glance, Example 4 appears to have no judgment, since it does not have inscribed judgment (e.g., it does not say "What did the *amazing* Constitution do?"); however, evoked judgment is prescribed linguistically within the example through the use of the word *do*. The alternative question, "What is the Constitution?", would have yielded a similar answer, but one without judgment and agency. The use of the word *do* positions the immigrant to believe inanimate objects have agency and can accomplish or complete things. In this example, immigrants are positioned to view objects as powerful, and are positioned to consider these objects as symbols of the United States. This positioning is subtle, and may not be noticed linguistically by ELL immigrants.

The previous examples demonstrate the lack of consistency in the linguistic interpersonal relationships created in the questions and answers on the study cards, and in turn on the revised US naturalization test. The imperative mood distances the immigrant test-takers, while the inclusive and exclusive pronouns both include and exclude the test-takers. The significance of the pronomial constructions will likely elude ELL adults with emerging literacy, therefore not leading them to internalize and learn the civic values and American ideals that the USCIS desires American citizens to hold. Evoked judgment, on the other hand, could subtly teach these desired values if the immigrant ELLs noticed the judgment and subsequent positioning. ELL adults with emerging literacy, however, may not have the linguistic capacity to understand the civic principles and American ideals being presented to them through clausal mood, pronomial constructions, and judgment. These subtle values would not only be lost on the L2 adult emergent reader, but would not be internalized. Such sophisticated linguistic usage may display a hidden ideology of the USCIS: that test-takers should be able to recognize and understand these linguistic constructions, and that those who do not understand them should not become US citizens.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, interpersonal relationships can also be created through images. Represented participants, or the people depicted in an image, can either interact directly with the reader by making eye contact, thereby creating a visual form of a direct address (2006: 117), or their gaze can look off the page, thereby distancing the viewer from the represented participant (43). Intimacy and distancing can also be achieved through the size of the frame; that is, if the image is a close-up, medium shot, or long shot (2006: 124). Finally, involvement and detachment can be represented through the angle in which the represented participants' body is shown in relation to the viewer (2006: 138).

While many of the USCIS study cards portray people, relatively few interactive (interpersonal) images are used. As a result, a large amount of interpersonal distancing between the US government test creators and the prospective citizens is being shown visually in this multimodal text. Figure 10, however, is representative of a direct relationship between the represented participants and the viewer. Here, a group of African slaves stare straight at the viewer / reader of the image. The medium-shot length of the photo provides the viewer with enough detail to see the participants, but simultaneously holds the viewer at a distance as well. The hostile gazes, crossed arms, hands on hips, and defiant posture create an uncomfortable relationship with the viewer, yet readers are invited into a relationship in this image by the direct gaze. Via this relationship, the creators could be choosing to engage immigrants in critical reflection about the slave trade in the United States. Such an interactive image, however, displays an assumption

on the part of the text creators that the immigrants possess the literacy skills to understand they are being invited to engage in this reflection. Prospective citizens with varying educational and cultural backgrounds and varying degrees of (Western) visual literacy may not recognize such an attempt at critical engagement.

Conversely the close-up picture of Susan B. Anthony in Figure 11 demonstrates interpersonal distancing as the woman in the picture is not engaged in direct eye contact with the viewer, and the woman's body is also angled away, signaling detachment. Images like Figure 11 are more common in the set of study cards than are images like Figure 10. The dearth of interactive images suggests that the creators of this text do not want to engage immigrants in direct dialogue, but instead prefer to present an idealized, unquestioned view of the nation.

FIGURE 10: Face B of Question 60.
Question: "What group of people was taken to America and sold as slaves?"
Answer: "Africans; people from Africa".
Caption: "Slaves on a Southern plantation in May 1862."

FIGURE 11: Face B of Question 77.
Question: "What did Susan B. Anthony do?"
Answer: "fought for women's rights; fought for civil rights".
Caption: "Susan B. Anthony."

Discrepancies between Image and Text

With the above framework and examples in mind, we can now analyze the three metafunctions concurrently in specific multimodal study cards. In the following section, I will discuss the disconnect between image and text, or visual design and linguistic structure, as displayed through the metafunctions. In particular, this analysis will focus on the disconnect between the linguistic and the visual, as regards the ideational content. Such an analysis can be applied to all cards of the multimodal ensemble, including the examples shown above; however, the following six cards provide exceptionally rich data.

Question 86 (Figure 12), asks about the major event that happened on September 11, 2001, in the United States. The answer is that terrorists attacked the United States. The linguistic adjacency pair is clear; yet, as Figure 13 shows, the image that accompanies the question is not

directly related to it. Reading the visual design of the image on Face B, we see a narrative reactional transactional process where the soldiers are Reactors, their salute is the Vector, and the Phenomenon is the firefighters securing the flag. Within the Phenomenon, the firefighters are the Actor, the flag is the Vector, and the building is the Goal. The soldiers are therefore reacting to the action the firefighters are doing. The image says, "Soldiers salute firefighters who hang a flag on a building."

The narrative representation on Face B of Question 86 portrays soldiers saluting firefighters who are draping a large American flag on the wall of the Pentagon. This information is gained through reading both the image and the accompanying caption. The juxtaposition of the image with the answer is incongruent as the image does not show terrorists attacking the United States, and instead implies that the major event of September 11, 2001, was the hanging of a large flag on a building. An immigrant reading only the visual and linguistic text of Face B could be tempted to believe soldiers and firefighters were terrorists, and they attacked the United States by putting an American flag on a building; for an emerging reader and a person with emerging visual literacy, this likely would create confusion. The caption to the image serves to partially clear the confusion, yet the small size of the letters in the caption make it seem less salient than the answer printed above. Furthermore, the text of the caption is beyond the supposed level of reading proficiency with words like "unfurl" and "scarred stone." There is a cause and effect, and a large amount of referential background knowledge or content schemata to this multimodal text that could therefore be difficult for immigrants to recognize.

FIGURE 12: Face A of Question 86.
Question: "What major event happened on September 11, 2001, in the United States?"

FIGURE 13: Face B of Question 86.
Answer: "Terrorists attacked the United States."
Caption: "Firefighters unfurl a large American flag over the scarred stone of the Pentagon on September 12, 2001."

As seen in Figures 14 and 15 below, many of the study cards have historic photographs or paintings associated with present tense questions. The question in Figure 14 strives to teach

American civics by asking a question about the President's Cabinet in the present tense; this present tense usage should imply to the immigrant test-taker that the duties of the President's Cabinet have not changed. The image in Figure 15 accompanying this question shows a President and his Cabinet; however, it shows President Reagan and his Cabinet in 1986. Via a strong vector, the Cabinet members are Reactors, and the President is the Actor in the Phenomenon; this level of reaction versus action seems to contradict the power bestowed linguistically on the Cabinet members as they are the subject of the question. This might lead the viewer / reader to draw assumptions about the relative power of the President and the Cabinet, perhaps based on their own experiences from other political contexts. Like the previous example, the caption here also provides additional clarifying information about the context of the image, but the focus of the caption's text and the focus of the image also are incongruent when read in juxtaposition to the printed question and answer. This disconnect between the written text and the visual image is subtler than the disconnect seen in the case of the firefighters and terrorists in the previous question, but the implications are equally profound when considering how ideational content is being presented to immigrant test-takers.

FIGURE 14: Face A of Question 35.
Question: "What does the President's Cabinet do?"

FIGURE 15: Face B of Question 35.
Answer: "advises the President".
Caption: "President Ronald Reagan leads a Cabinet meeting at the White House in September 1986."

Figure 17, accompanying Question 20 (seen in Figure 16 below), shows a seated man from the late 19th century; the question, like the previous example, is also concerned with the present. The offered answer does not provide all the names of current Senators; it thus puts the onus of finding and knowing that answer onto the immigrant. The use of the pronoun "your" in the question creates a direct relationship with the immigrant test-taker, which could cause them to expect a specific answer; such an answer is not provided on the back of the card. The direct relationship could potentially also cause the immigrant to expect a specific image of their own Senator, yet the accompanying image does not match anyone's current US Senator, instead showing a historical image of the US's first African American Senator. Additionally, the design

of the image with the Senator's body angled away from the viewer creates a sense of detachment; this visual detachment opposes the linguistic direct relationship found in the pronoun "your." The caption clarifies the image and its relationship to the question and answer, noting that the person's Senator is not the one pictured; yet, similar to Figure 13, the small font makes the caption appear less important than the answer in large font, and in this way, the clarification may fail for an adult emergent reader. Furthermore, the caption also demonstrates an assumption that the immigrant test-taker has knowledge of why it is significant that Hiram Revels is the first African American Senator, and why he would be pictured on a study card related to Senators. The creators of the study material are attempting to teach American history to the immigrant test-takers by including historical images such as these, but for adult emergent readers, images that do not directly relate to the written text may not be beneficial, but rather detrimental. Finally, much like the anecdote that began this article, the use of such historical images in conjunction with non-specific answers implies a belief held by the test creators that potential citizens should have the skills and abilities to not only recognize that what is printed on the card is not the answer—and that the accompanying image is supplementary and not directly related to the answer—but also to be able to find the answers to questions such as this, whether through internet research, classroom discussion, etc.

FIGURE 16: Face A of Question 20.
Question: "Who is one of your state's US Senators now?"

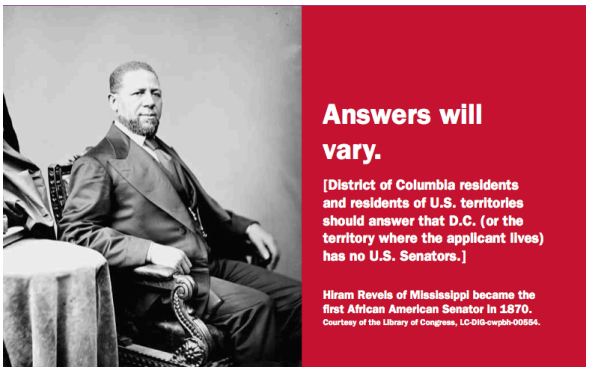

FIGURE 17: Face B of Question 20.
Answer: "Answers will vary. [District of Columbia residents and residents of U.S. territories should answer that D.C. (or the territory where the applicant lives) has no US Senators.]"
Caption: "Hiram Revels of Mississippi became the first African American Senator in 1870."

Question 50 (Figure 18 below) also attempts to teach American civics and history with the question directly pertaining to civics, and the image accompanying the question related to American history. The question, however, positions the immigrant outside the community of US citizens by stating that only "US citizens" can participate in "their" democracy by voting in

a federal election or running for a federal office. According to this question, immigrants without citizenship status are deprived of participating in these specific democratic processes. This question therefore positions immigrant test-takers outside of the community that participates in democracy in this manner. Furthermore, while the question concerns the rights of US citizens, the accompanying image, Figure 19 below, is a historical photo of a man playing a tuba surrounded by a group of boys. In this narrative reactional non-transactional process, the boys are the Reactors, their gaze is the Vector, and the Phenomenon is the man in the middle playing the tuba; the man with the tuba is the Actor, and his gaze is the Vector, but there is no Goal in this image. The image is thus read as, "Boys look at a man with a tuba who looks at something." Reading only Face A and looking at the image, an immigrant could be tempted to think tuba-playing was a right only for United States citizens, or, reading just Face B, the immigrant could think playing the tuba was necessary to vote in a federal election, or to run for federal office; a more effective image, one that would match the direct content of the question being asked, would show a citizen voting or engaging in activities associated with running for federal office. Similar to the previous examples, the caption provides additional information about the image; this caption, however, does not give enough information to explain why George W. Johnson is an important figure in US history, why it is necessary to know he played with a Boy Scout band in 1924, or to further explain how this image relates to the ideational linguistic content. In this way, this caption serves to widen the disconnect between the visual and the linguistic aspects presented on this study card. This exemplifies the presupposed cultural background knowledge and (multi)literacy skills the test designers assume the immigrant holds.

FIGURE 18: Face A of Question 50.
Question: "Name one right only for United States citizens."

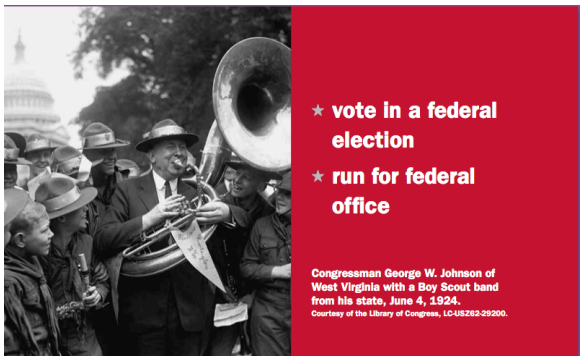

FIGURE 19: Face B of Question 50.
Answer: "vote in a federal election; run for Federal office".
Caption: "Congressman George W. Johnson of West Virginia with a Boy Scout band from his state, June 4, 1924."

Unlike Question 20 (Figure 16 above), Question 24 and its answer do not utilize possessive pronouns; the question asks about US Senators in general, and the answer places the immigrant

in a general community of all people in one state, though the idea of the one state is not explicitly referenced in the language. The accompanying image, Figure 21 below, does not visually represent the general community of one state; instead, the image is of US flags from different eras of US history hanging on the porch of the US Capitol Building. Such representation with no people also serves to further distance the immigrant. Furthermore, unlike the previous examples discussed in this section, this is a conceptual image. The image is related to the answer through layered conceptual structures; here, the porch is a Possessive Attribute of the Carrier (the Capitol Building), and the Capitol Building is indexing the US Senators who meet there. Additionally, the flags are a Symbolic Attribute of the Carrier (the United States of America); this symbolism is denoted by the stripes representing the 13 original colonies, and the stars representing all the US states. Like the previous examples, this question and answer and accompanying image require referential background knowledge, particularly in US symbolism, for a reader to fully understand the entire multimodal ensemble. The assumed knowledge of this symbolism is evidenced by the lack of an accompanying caption to explain what the flags mean, and where the flags are hung. This further demonstrates the imagined community of immigrant test-takers for whom these study cards were created, and the intended distancing of immigrants who do not understand the symbolism of such objects.

FIGURE 20: Face A of Question 24.
Question: "Who does a US Senator represent?"

FIGURE 21: Face B of Question 24.
Answer: "all people of the state".

Finally, Figure 23 is another conceptual image; it is a symbolic process where the jury box is the Carrier, representing the United States, and the seats are the Symbolic Attribute, which attribute serving on a jury to citizens of the United States of America. The image is read as "serving on a jury symbolizes the United States of America." The symbolism underlying the jury box may not be immediately apparent to immigrants from cultures where democracy and civic participation are not valued, or to immigrants who are not familiar with the layout of a

courtroom in a society where the judicial system is jury-based; to them, this image may simply be chairs.

Furthermore, the use of the word "responsibility" in the question (as seen in Figure 22) denotes that though this is something that *must* be done, it is special since it is *only* for US citizens. This evoked judgment positions the immigrant test-taker to want to become a citizen so that he / she can have the special responsibility of serving on a jury or voting in a federal election. These responsibilities, however, vary as US citizens have a legal requirement to serve on a jury when summoned, but have only a moral responsibility to vote in a federal election. These different obligations are not explained in this question-and-answer pair; such a subtle nuance between legal and moral obligation may not be recognized by immigrants from countries with different expectations for citizens. Additionally, the choice of words like "responsibility" and "only" may go unnoticed by L2 adult emergent readers. Ultimately, when reading the linguistic in conjunction with the visual, this study card has a disconnect between the two; it also displays an inherent belief that the immigrant test-taker already knows and understands the symbolism apparent in the image, and that the test-taker not only notices the use of charged words like *responsibility* and *only*, but also makes the connection between those words and the symbolism of the jury box.

FIGURE 22: Face A of Question 49.
Question: "What is one responsibility that is only for United States citizens?*"

FIGURE 23: Face B of Question 49.
Answer: "serve on a jury; vote in a federal election".

For all the examples discussed above, the difficulty immigrants—in particular L2 adult emergent readers from refugee backgrounds—could have making appropriate connections between the multimodal printed questions and answers and the provided visual images is related to a lack of relevant background knowledge and content schemata. These schemata are vital for readers to fully understand and interpret a text so that meaning can be made (Kern 2000; Kramsch 1993; Nolden & Kramsch 1996). Since the majority of the questions on the United States naturalization test are based on the rights and responsibilities of US citizens, and on

content relating to United States history and government, refugee-background adults' illiteracy in reading these multimodal images and their truncated repertoire of relevant schemata may therefore hinder both their understanding of the text, and their learning / internalization of American values and civic responsibility. Ultimately, this means they would not be able to attain the stated goals of the revised naturalization test.

Nolden and Kramsch state that "teaching cross-cultural literacy is not 'teaching culture' in the usual sense of merely imparting a body of essentialist knowledge" (1996: 65). In order for culture, or, in this case, civic values, to be taught and understood, the "essences of particularity" (Becker 1986: 29; Wittgenstein 1958) must be addressed. As Becker (1986) succinctly puts it, particularity is something we arrive at, something we achieve, something we learn through repeated practice. While the US naturalization test and its accompanying study materials are attempting to teach culture and critical awareness of what it means to be a citizen, they fail because immigrants or refugees who are English language learners and emergent readers may be focused more on the decoding of words than on the meaning. The test is thus imparting a body of essentialist knowledge; it is not teaching culture or critical awareness of citizenship, but teaching answers to be decoded and memorized. The use of images tries to alleviate the lack of understanding that refugee-background adults may have, and to help them understand these cultural references and norms, but the lack of images that relate to their schemata detracts from this goal. Instead, people with a refugee or immigration background are left not understanding the culture as a dynamic practice, and repeat memorized phrases.

Power, Pedagogy, and (Dis)citizenship

The notion of "one language, one nation" (Piller 2001: 261) pervades the naturalization test and study materials, with English being shown as the preferred language in the United States, and a gatekeeper to citizenship. The combination of covert language assessment and taken-for-granted cultural / civic literacy in one test, however, may have negative repercussions for refugee-background adults who are emergent readers and English language learners. While it can be argued that language mastery is part of being a successful citizen, this set of official study materials provided by the USCIS 1) does not include study materials for the English language itself, 2) does not provide advice or instructions for mastering the assessment tool, and 3) does not promote cultural understanding and (multi)literacy as much as it promotes rote memorization of answers. Though the naturalization test claims to instill cultural knowledge and to be a test of cultural literacy and civics, it is first a test of English reading and writing literacy, second an assessment of test-taking literacy, and third a test of cultural literacy.

Ultimately, the naturalization test violates Brown and Abeywickrama's (2010) framework for effective tests (see also Messick 1989, and McNamara & Ryan 2011 for discussions of validity); the combination of language assessment and civic and cultural literacy is not a valid form of assessment, and the test is not an authentic assessment of English language use and linguistic knowledge, nor of American values and ideals.

Tests are administered by powerful institutions. "Use-oriented testing," such as the naturalization test, is "embedded in educational, social, and political contexts" where the results can have detrimental effects on test-takers (Shohamy 2001: 4). Because immigrants must earn a passing score on this assessment in order to become US citizens, the high-stakes nature of this test may cause immigrants to focus on learning how to say the correct answer, more so than understanding what they are saying. For stateless resettled refugees, the symbolic and ideological power (Bourdieu 1991) associated with US citizenship may dominate how they study for the assessment and what they learn from it. As Widdowson (1978) argues, interpretation is necessary for meaning to take place, but L2 adult emergent readers from non-Western countries with refugee backgrounds may have to choose between interpreting and understanding content, and decoding and memorizing words.

The foregoing critical multimodal social semiotic analysis determines that the (2012) USICS *Civics Flash Cards for the Naturalization Test* are likely not effective for refugee-background adults with emerging English literacy, who have had little-to-no formal schooling. The study cards provide answers to be memorized for what becomes a test of traditional literacy. Furthermore, civic values are probably not fostered because the test-takers may not be able to understand the intricacies of the multimodal text. The lack of efficacy of these study cards may push this population further to the outside and position them as (dis)citizens.

The effects of this high-stakes testing may mean that people from a refugee or migration background in particular, who do not understand the entire multimodal text are pushed to the side and left out of the community of citizens. If citizenship is a process where full participation is gained through access (Ramanathan 2013), then a hidden ideology emerges from these cards where citizenship is dependent on being able to interpret the text, while (dis)citizenship, or "citizenship-minus" (Pothier & Devlin 2006: 2), ensues for immigrants who are unable to interpret the Western multimodal text. As Pothier and Devlin (2006: 2) note, (dis)citizenship is enforced by both inclusion and exclusion because one cannot exist without the other. Furthermore,

> […] citizenship is dependent upon categorical thinking and boundaries—that is, its inclusion of some (insiders) necessarily requires the exclusion of others (outsiders)—the consequence is the reproduction of illegitimate hierarchies. This highlights the janus-faced nature of citizenship; its inclusionary dynamic engenders belonging and solidarity, but its exclusionary dimension enforces oppression and marginalization. (Devlin & Pothier 2006: 146)

Park's (2008: 1003) assertions that the revised naturalization test hides an exclusionary principle-based construct of American citizenship are salient, as a lack of comprehension of the principles prescribed in the naturalization test fosters marginalization, and makes not citizens, but (dis)citizens. The lack of access to the civic values and cultural aspects presented in the multimodal official study materials for the US naturalization test may cause (dis)citizenship, thereby hindering full participation in American society by non-Western refugee-background adults with emerging literacy.

Teachers must be prepared to address the issues apparent in these study cards with their refugee-background L2 adult emergent readers who are striving to earn US citizenship. Unfortunately, most of these refugee-background students in the US are not enrolled in citizenship classes, as the classes require intermediate level English (Refugee Education Program, personal communication, March 9, 2018). With this in mind, the teachers of this population could incorporate a multiliteracies framework such as Serafini (2014: 43) into their ESL and English literacy classes; this framework encompasses the perceptual, structural, and ideological interpretive dimensions. Through the perceptual dimension, teachers can instruct their students in how to notice, navigate, and name elements of visual images and multimodal texts; this includes aspects of composition and basic elements of design, as well as noticing the focus of what is presented in the image or multimodal text. The structural dimension covers grammar, structures, and conventions of visual images and multimodal texts; teachers can introduce their students to the codes and conventions of visual design—specifically Western visual design, and to symbols and recurring patterns within a culture's visual and multimodal conventions. Finally, the ideological dimension provides a framework for reflection on the context, culture, and history of an image, and introduces students to the cultural symbols and myths of a culture as represented visually. The inclusion of a multiliteracies framework into the ESL and English literacy class would be beneficial for the students in all regards of literacy and schooling, as knowledge of the frameworks can be transferred to all images and multimodal texts. Students would therefore be prepared to read visual images both in the classroom and outside of the

classroom, but also to use materials such as self-study cards to prepare for the naturalization test.

If an L2 adult emergent reader is enrolled in a citizenship class, the combination of the perceptual, structural, and ideological interpretive dimensions discussed above could allow educators to help their students to better understand the cultural values and civic norms of the United States as represented in the multimodal study cards; this would occur through explicit instruction in these dimensions and application to the study cards. The current official study cards, however, may still require too advanced a level of multimodal literacy to be effective for L2 adult emergent readers. The solution to remedy this is to create a set of naturalization test study materials specifically for refugee-background L2 adult emergent readers from non-Western cultures. Self-study materials tailored to how this population understands multimodal texts could better equip them to prepare for the naturalization test.

Concluding Remarks

The multiple literacies needed to comprehend and adopt the civic responsibilities and American values contained in this multimodal text show it is aimed at an institutionally imagined community of immigrants who are already literate in particular visual grammars and norms of multimodal composition, who have more than a high-beginning command of the English language, and who are experienced test-takers. An ideology of American citizenship is being presented to test-takers in the study cards; the ideal immigrant would be able to grasp this ideology and become the ideal "citizen." Immigrants such as those with a refugee background who also have emerging literacy, however, are at a disadvantage as they may focus on decoding and memorizing words instead of understanding the meaning of the content and the associated images. There is a subtle exclusionary ideology presented in the study cards through the Western visual composition and linguistic features which position members of this population on the margins of American society and prevent them from fully participating as citizens. Ultimately for this population, US citizenship is determined through English language and literacy rather than through demonstration of civic awareness and American values. This is problematic because it establishes the hidden ideology that English language and literacy are regarded as the foundation of US citizenship. This exclusionary belief, however, is not explicitly put forth in US naturalization discourse; it remains veiled to even immigrants seeking to gain citizenship, thereby further positioning them as (dis)citizens.

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Endnotes

[1] For a full list of questions, and to view the additional official study materials, see the USCIS page https://www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/naturalization-test.

[2] While García et al. (2008) make a compelling argument for the use of the term *emergent bilinguals* instead of *English Language Learners* (ELL) in K–12 contexts, ELL is used within the Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) community. This article uses the term ELL with regards to adult LESLLA learners.

[3] The new test was piloted in ten cities throughout the United States chosen by geographic location and number of citizenship applications. The cities were Albany, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; Charleston, South Carolina; Denver, Colorado; El Paso, Texas; Kansas City, Missouri; Miami, Florida; San Antonio, Texas; Tucson, Arizona; and Yakima, Washington (USCIS 2007).

[4] The USCIS fact sheet and FAQs provide only vague information about who these "ESL experts" are. USCIS (2007, FAQs) states that these experts were "affiliated with *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages* (TESOL)." No specific names of experts are provided. See also Chenoweth & Burdick (2007), Kunnan (2009: 93), and Laglagaron & Devani (2008).