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Culture in Textbook Analysis and Evaluation

KAREN RISAGER AND CAROL A. CHAPELLE

Introduction

Textbooks often play a central role in the formal teaching of foreign and second languages, especially at beginning level. To this day, much language teaching is structured by published textbooks, even if it is supplemented with other materials from the Internet or elsewhere. In view of the importance of textbooks in providing learners with their first authoritative glimpses of the target culture, only a little work in applied linguistics has explored issues concerning the choice of cultural content for textbooks. However, the research that has been conducted points to the importance of different ways of representing culture, the ideological dimensions of cultural choices authors make, as well as the variety of methodological perspectives that are useful.

Cultural Representation: Modernism and Postmodernism

The central culture-related question for language textbook analysis reflects the tension between modernist and postmodernist perspectives: Is it possible to define and present an objective image of the foreign culture, or is the content of the textbook always dependent on the cultural perspective of the author(s), located in time and space? The modernist approach emphasizes knowledge of facts and structures. It demands of the textbook that it present a maximally true, realistic, and representative picture of the foreign society and culture. It should present "society in a nutshell," or present "a panorama of the culture." Most textbook production is influenced by this perspective, trying to offer learners some basic and authoritative knowledge of the target language country/ies, written by authors who do not intend to show explicitly any subjective evaluation of the material presented.

The postmodernist approach, in contrast, emphasizes the role of different perspectives in cultural representation. In postmodernism, culture is dependent on the eyes that see. Some of the proponents of this approach take an explicit antiessentialist stance, maintaining that there is not "a culture" out there to describe, but that any descriptions and stories about others are always social and cultural constructions produced from a particular perspective and under specific historical and social circumstances.

These questions are important for textbook analysis, but they are very seldom if ever raised in the textbooks themselves, and the textbook authors remain more or less anonymous to students and teachers, who are unlikely to ask questions such as why the author chose to include characters of a particular nationality or particular locations within a particular country. Scholars in applied linguistics, however, have raised the discussion of modernism, postmodernism, and antiessentialism in textbook production and analysis (Kramsch, 1988; Zarate, 1993; Risager, 1998).

Cultural Choices: The National Tradition and Transnational Challenge

From around 1850 until around 1990, foreign and second language teaching including textbooks was entirely dominated by the national paradigm. This means that the cultural content has been focused on the country/ies in which the target language is the main first language or official language. The frame of description has been the nation-state, most often presented as "the country," seen in isolation as expressed by the metaphors "society in a nutshell" or "panorama of the culture." Prior to this period, the content of language textbooks typically had a much broader, almost encyclopedic character, encompassing for example the elements, the earth, the body, the economy, grammar, music, geography, history, and angels (Comenius, 1649; see also Risager, 2007).

A number of analyses of textbooks conceived in the national tradition have appeared, particularly in Europe, where the integration process following World War II raised awareness of the importance of cultural knowledge and understanding. It was widely realized that language teaching and the cultural content of textbooks could be important contributors to an increased awareness of cultural similarities and differences among the European nation-states. For instance, a joint British-German project conducted an analysis and evaluation of the representation of Britain in German textbooks for the teaching of English (Doyé, 1991) and a corresponding analysis of the representation of Germany in British textbooks for the teaching of German (Byram, 1993). The project was mostly conceived within the modernist approach, emphasizing accuracy, representativeness, realism, and educational potential. Other analyses along these lines were conducted by Krauskopf (1985), Friz (1991), and Wegner (1999). Risager (1991) analyzed trends in the cultural

representations displayed in European language textbooks. The analysis was mainly conceived in the modernist and national tradition but underscored the need for authors to include topics on international and intercultural processes and relations in textbooks.

Sercu (2000) conducted a major empirical project on the teaching of German in Flemish-speaking Belgium, also within the national approach. She studied the development of pupils' intercultural communicative competence, and her investigation dealt both with pupils' perceptions of Germany and with the sociocultural content of six different textbooks used in the classrooms. Among the results of the analysis of the textbooks was an analytical distinction between two types of perspectives in the cultural representation of the textbooks: the outsider/tourist perspective and the insider/family perspective. The first perspective tends to focus on cultural differences, including a number of informative details about society and culture but presenting a relatively flat description of characters. The other tends to focus on both differences and similarities. It provides less information on society and culture, and the description of characters is more rounded. Among Sercu's conclusions was that intercultural competence is best supported if textbooks comprise many different perspectives, both from within and without, and if topics are clearly directed toward the knowledge and interests of the pupils.

Since the 1990s the national paradigm has been increasingly problematized, particularly within the teaching of English as an international language. The problem is illuminated by Risager's (2007) analysis of the international history of culture pedagogy since the 1880s, which includes discussion of discourses on language, culture, and nation, and which traces the transition from a national paradigm to the beginnings of a transnational and global paradigm, not only for English, but for any language taught as first, second, or foreign language.

One aspect of this development toward a more global outlook is the wish to include not only "center" countries like France in the teaching of French, but also other French-speaking countries and areas, taking a more international and perhaps postcolonial and global perspective. An example could be the textbook for French, *Orientations*, described in Starkey (1991), which has been elaborated with a view to developing pupils' awareness of transnational and global issues.

Such a perspective toward culture in textbooks requires authors and analysts to reason in order to justify choices of cultural content. Finding little Canadian and Quebecois cultural content of beginning French language teaching materials in use in schools in the northern United States, Chapelle (2009) uses the transnational paradigm to argue that American students living in the northern United States should learn about the language and culture of Canada and Quebec. She points out the value of Canadian and Quebecois cultural content which offers opportunities to explore aspects of local historical, linguistic, and cultural diversity, such as the non-neutral, political role of language and identity in Canadian society, and the complex history of migration of French Canadians across the US-Canadian border. Such ideologically different perspectives are potentially useful in the US context, where a goal for foreign language teaching is for students to increase intercultural competence, which encompasses their ability to critically examine such American assumptions as the normality of monolingualism and the neutrality of language (Chapelle, 2010).

Such an analysis of cultural value needs to include not only the target culture but the students' own cultural background and needs. Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990) proposed, for example, that the production of textbooks for English taught as a lingua franca in Morocco focuses on the learners' own country, enabling them to describe and appreciate their own culture in communication with foreigners (see also the analysis in Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

Research Purposes and Methods

Textbooks may be analyzed for a variety of purposes and from many different angles. First of all, it is important to distinguish between practical and scientific purposes. A practical purpose could be the evaluation of textbooks with respect to their usefulness in classroom situations, and this analysis could be guided by a set of established criteria—or could result in such criteria. The publications mentioned above, Doyé (1991) and Byram (1993), are examples of studies that are mostly evaluative in this way. In such research, the motivation is pragmatic and the methodology is chosen to produce useable, defensible results typically in the immediate context.

Research for scientific purposes can raise a number of philosophical and methodological questions: How is the object of study constructed—is it the text itself, parts of the text, parts of the context of the text, and so forth? Does the analysis focus on cultural representations, on text genres, on discourses, on the role of textbooks in society? And is the philosophical foundation of the analysis characterized by positivism, hermeneutics, critical theory, social constructionism, or other perspectives? Most of the other references in this article have scientific purposes, although not all are equally explicit about purpose and philosophy.

Methodology should be evident from the documentation of the study, and here we can see a range of different methods developing: from quantitative content analysis encompassing the counting of words or topics in larger amounts of texts (e.g., Chapelle, 2009), to more qualitative discourse analysis of selected passages (e.g., Kramersch, 1988; Chapelle, 2010) and impressionistic readings of textbooks (e.g., Risager, 1991).

Another example of a quantitative study is Dechert and Kastner's (1989) investigation of the interests of students of German (in the USA) and the actual cultural content of textbooks for German. They established a predefined list of 99 potential cultural topics and asked 286 students at the first four semesters of German to fill out a questionnaire concerning their amount of interest in these topics. The results were then compared to the actual content of 10 textbooks, and in the discussion the authors emphasize that textbooks should reflect both students' interests and teachers' (textbook writers') views of what the students need to know. A study of teachers in Denmark and England, including their attitudes to and evaluation of the cultural content of textbooks, was undertaken both quantitatively and qualitatively by Byram and Risager (1999). Sercu (2005), with a group of teachers and researchers, conducted a cross-European quantitative study of language teachers' beliefs regarding intercultural competence teaching, including their views on teaching materials, and Sercu's (2000) study of Belgian learners' perceptions of Germany and of the sociocultural content of their textbooks was also conducted using a quantitative methodology.

Another approach to research is the critical analysis of textbooks seen as products embedded in wider institutional, cultural, and political contexts. Kramersch (1988), for example, conducted an analysis of the foreign language textbook as a social genre and a cultural product in its own right, including discussions of the role of publishers, state departments, and teachers in addition to a microanalysis of a number of textbooks for German with emphasis on the multitude of voices in dialogues and readings. Zarate (1993) emphasizes that textbooks and language teaching in general are historically embedded and therefore sensitive to the fluctuations of geopolitical relations. Dendrinos (1992) approaches textbook analysis from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, focusing particularly on the ideological content of textbooks, on the authority of the textbook, and on pedagogical and political discourse in relation to the subject of English (see also Auerbach, 1995, for a critical discussion of the authority of the textbook in ESL, English as a second language).

Sercu (2000) contains an extensive discussion of qualitative and quantitative approaches to textbook analysis, which may be useful for framing future research investigating foreign

language textbooks. To date, however, analysis of cultural content in textbooks remains a relatively underexplored field of study in spite of the potentially important role of textbooks for the development of cultural knowledge and intercultural competence. A strong rationale for cultural content of textbooks seems to be an important beginning point for ultimately developing a range of relevant materials and experiences for language students to learn about and experience culture in a manner that leads to intercultural competence.

SEE ALSO: Critical Discourse Analysis; Cultural Representation; Culture; Materials Development; Teaching Culture and Intercultural Competence; World Englishes and Language Pedagogy

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Cummins, Jim

TOVE SKUTNABB-KANGAS

Professor James (Jim) Patrick Cummins (born July 3, 1949, in Dublin, Ireland) is one of the world's most influential researchers in bilingualism studies. His research has focused on various aspects of literacy development in multilingual school contexts, particularly the relationship between students' home languages (L1) and their developing proficiency in the dominant language(s) of instruction. He has also highlighted the interactions between societal power relations and teacher–students identity negotiation, arguing that only instruction that explicitly challenges coercive power relations in the wider society will be effective in promoting subordinated group students' academic achievement.

Jim Cummins grew up in Ireland and experienced firsthand through his schooling both immersion education and the challenges of reviving an endangered language (Irish). He started his studies at The National University of Ireland (psychology). After his PhD (1974, Alberta) he worked for two years in Dublin at the Educational Research Centre and then returned to Canada. Since 1978 he has been at the Modern Language Centre, OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), Toronto (see www.iteachilearn.org/cummins).

A prolific researcher and writer, Cummins has authored close to 20 books and edited an additional 11. He has also written almost 200 book chapters and more than 100 refereed journal articles. His work has focused on issues of policy and practice relating to the