

## Language textbooks

windows to the world

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## **Language textbooks: windows to the world**

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## **Abstract**

### **Language textbooks: windows to the world**

What images of the world do we find in language textbooks? What countries and continents are favoured, what key problems of the world are mentioned and taken up, what segments of the world's populations are represented and how, what role is given to the understanding of world history, colonialism and imperialism, what role is given to the understanding of transnational processes? Are there blind spots in the representation of the world? This article challenges the tradition of focusing on the representation of 'countries' in language teaching – target language countries and the country of the learners. It takes an explicit global perspective, drawing on a range of critical approaches to the study of culture, society and the world: National studies, citizenship education studies, Cultural studies, postcolonial studies and transnational studies. The article argues that the approaches imply different sets of analytical questions regarding the cultural content of language textbooks. Examples of questions and analyses are taken from textbooks for a number of languages taught in Denmark: English, German and French in lower secondary school and Spanish in upper secondary school.

## **Keywords**

Textbook analysis; intercultural learning, English, French, Spanish

# Language Textbooks: Windows to the World

7159 words

## Introduction

Today, language textbooks and other materials for language learning, print or digital, may offer a diverse range of representations of the world. Besides imagined situations of communication in the target language, textbooks usually offer some representations of the everyday life of various groups in society, food and drink, festivals, portraits of people, examples of the use of social media and IT, issues related to social and political conditions, climate and the environment, issues of migration, as well as examples of short stories, songs and videos. All this may be organised in topics, scenarios and storylines, and is often carried by the visual element in multimodal texts: portrait photos, drawings of people talking, images of streets, monuments and landscapes. Thus, language textbooks today usually offer some inputs to the intercultural learning and citizenship education of students while at the same time helping them develop their communicative skills and language awareness.

There is no general consensus about what should be included in the cultural representations (or the cultural content), and the inputs which have been selected are often fragmented and heterogeneous. In some analyses, certain textbooks are shown to be ideologically biased in favour of middle-class travel and consumerism (Gray 2010, among others). This situation has led to many different approaches to the analysis of the cultural content of language textbooks, such as Ammer 1988, Auger 2007, Bori 2018, Byram 1993, Canale 2016, Chapelle 2016, Corti 2019, Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger 2015, Dendrinos 1992, Gray 2010, Gray 2013, Kramsch & Vinall 2015, Risager 1991, Risager 2018 (in which there is an historical overview of the international literature concerning culture in language textbooks).

In comparison to these various approaches, the present approach (and the one in Risager 2018) takes an explicit global perspective. The point of departure is the planet as a whole: If we imagine looking at the Earth from the Moon, we can think of the different continents and oceans, the different landscapes, flora and fauna, the atmosphere, climate and weather, all the different ethnicities, life forms and perspectives, all the different languages, different states and supra- and international organisations, transnational processes and practices such as economic and cultural globalisation, and key world problems such as climate change, inequality, conflicts and migrations. The question is: what image of the world does the individual textbook hint at? What does it include, and what does it exclude? What are the blind spots? An analysis of such questions presupposes an awareness of theoretical approaches to 'the global', and in the following, I distinguish between five approaches:

- National studies: which countries are represented, and how?
- Citizenship education studies: are key problems of the world represented?
- Cultural studies: which cultural and social identities are represented?
- Postcolonial studies: are aspects of world history represented?
- Transnational studies: are links between different parts of the world represented?

The article draws on a larger theoretical and empirical study (Risager 2018). In that study, six textbooks used in Denmark in 2015, addressing young people of 13+ or adults, are analysed. The textbooks, including teacher's guides, learner's guides and websites, are meant for the teaching of English, German, French, Spanish, Danish and Esperanto respectively, and they are analysed with regard

to their representations of the world, using a form of critical discourse analysis. The aim of the study is not to investigate language teaching in Denmark in particular, but to illustrate how one can analyse cultural representations in any language textbook based on the above-mentioned five approaches to the global. In the present article, I only refer to the analyses of the textbooks for English, German, French and Spanish – all of them taught as foreign languages in Danish schools.

### **Foreign languages in global perspective**

It is often more or less tacitly understood that language teaching should focus on the target language as it is spoken in the ‘target-language countries’. But this is a view that is not in harmony with sociolinguistic views of language use in the world (Risager 2006).

In a sociolinguistic perspective, language teaching is clearly a field of global relevance, most of all the teaching of English, but also other languages of broader international use, such as Spanish, French, Chinese, Arabic and German. After all, a language like German, for example, is not only spoken in the German-speaking countries, but also by tourists, students, business people, diplomats, pensioners, German teachers, engineers, doctors, musicians etc. all over the world. Moreover, German-language media content may be received, and produced, in most parts of the world. The same may be said of languages like Spanish, French, Chinese and Arabic. And it should be added that all the languages mentioned may be used as *lingua francas* if needed, in many parts of the world, i.e. used as a common medium of communication between people who have no other common language.

There are books and other texts in these languages on innumerable topics. Thus, one can very well gain insights into Vietnam and its history through texts in, say, German. One may learn about the whole world through any of the larger national or official languages of the world.

At the same time, it should also be noted that a great advantage of language learning is that it may offer new perspectives on the world, both because it is a new language for the learner, and because the language in question has developed in other parts of Europe or the world, characterised by particular geographical conditions, historical experiences and ideas. Learning English, French, German, Spanish or Chinese may lead to the awareness that there are other perspectives on the world (e.g. Vietnam and its history) than that of those of the students themselves.

Thus, when one learns English, German, French or Spanish (the languages referred to in the sections below), one learns a language that is a world language because it may be used, in certain contexts, all over the world as first, second or foreign language or as a *lingua franca*.

### **Target-language countries in global perspective**

If the aim of foreign language teaching in school is not only learning to communicate in the target language in certain situations and contexts, but also to develop insights into cultural and social conditions (and this is the case in Denmark and many other countries), it is usually understood as referring to cultural and social conditions in the target-language countries, i.e. the countries where the target language is the dominating first language (like in Britain or Ireland) or official language with important functions in, for example, education (like India or Nigeria). Often the teaching will focus on the most central or powerful countries (like the United States and Britain in English teaching, Germany in German teaching, etc.) But if one only looks at these countries (states) as isolated entities, each with its own national institutions and national culture, one does not get a grasp of the interdependence of all regions and countries in the modern globalized world. France, for example, is deeply integrated in the rest of the world, being a member of the EU, NATO, the UN, OECD, G7 and G20, and countless other international organisations and fora. It is linked to other parts of the world through special relationships with former colonies, by global trade and all other kinds of cooperation, and by

being integrated in transnational migration networks. Thus, when one learns about one of the target-language countries, it should not be forgotten that this country is a player on the world scene.

### **The production, use and analysis of language textbooks in global perspective**

The global perspective is also relevant when it comes to the production and use of textbooks as well as the methodology of textbook analysis. Where are we in the world, and what perspective is taken?

A (language) textbook may be produced in one country and used in another. The producers may originate in different countries. The textbook may explicitly or implicitly address students in certain areas of the world. The teachers using the textbook may originate in different countries, and so may the students. The analyst may originate and/or work in a country different from the country of production and the country/ies of use. So, it is important to be aware of the geographical and cultural positionings and perspectives involved in all phases.

As already mentioned, the primary empirical material for the present article is the set of four out of six textbooks used in Denmark, and analysed in Risager 2018 (see Appendix):

- *A Piece of Cake*: age levels 13-16 (from intermediate level; English started at 9 years of age)
- *Du bist dran* [It's Your Turn]: German, age levels 13-16 (from near-beginners' level)
- *Français Formidable* [Fabulous French]: French, age levels 13-16 (from beginners' level)
- *Caminando* [On the Way]: Spanish, age levels 15-16 and adults (from beginners' level)

*Du bist dran* was originally produced and used in Norway, and the others were originally produced and used in Sweden. This situation is very common as there is a Scandinavian market in this field, and it is relatively easy to translate, adapt and re-edit textbooks in another Scandinavian country. All four textbooks may be said to (implicitly) represent a Scandinavian perspective on the world. I, as the analyst, originate in Denmark, i.e. in the country of use. Therefore, there may be blind spots in my analysis that an analyst from, for example, Italy, Cameroon or Singapore would not have.

In the following sections, I present the five approaches mentioned above and offer some examples from the four textbooks for English, German, French and Spanish. It should be stressed that the textbooks do not represent 'language teaching in Denmark'. They serve as illustrations of analyses according to the five approaches, and only represent themselves.

### **National studies: which countries are represented, and how?**

National studies primarily sees the world as *a mosaic of countries* (states, nations) more or less isolated from one another, and intercultural learning is primarily seen as gaining knowledge about (some of) these countries. Knowledge about a country (often referred to by its German term *Landeskunde*) is the oldest and most widespread interest when it comes to the cultural content of language education (Ammer 1988, Byram 1993). The question is how broad and varied the representation is - or should be. How about everyday life, literature, social conditions, institutions, religion, geography and history, etc.?

A more recent preoccupation, one that I will focus on here, is the question of which countries are represented. Countries may be dealt with explicitly (e.g. a chapter on Ireland), or they may be just mentioned in passing (a backpacker from Thailand is mentioned), or indirectly referred to, without the name of the country being mentioned ('manga' may be an indirect reference to Japan). It might be said that the more countries and continents are represented in the textbook, the more it serves as a window to the whole world. One aspect of this question is whether the country of learning (the country in which the textbook is used) is represented as well, and how.

So, the question is: What image of the world does the textbook offer, given the range of countries it represents? In which order are they represented? Are there significant blind spots?

In the English textbook, *A Piece of Cake*, the following target-language countries and regions are represented, in this order (as themes in chapters): Britain (almost only London), the USA (with a focus on Native Americans), Hawaii, Canada (including Québec), Georgia, New York City, Ireland, Australia and South Africa. There is a text on a village in India (in a chapter on the environment), and there are short references to Belfast and to ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. There is also a text (a letter) on Scotland on the website. There are a couple of indirect references to Australia: an explanation of the expression ‘peach melba’ and a story about the life of a koala. New Zealand is indirectly referred to in an explanation of the name ‘Wellington’, and there are two small indirect references to Wales.

There is a clear focus on countries in which English is the first language of the majority, i.e. a clear focus on the Western world (except the focus on Native Americans). Very large areas of the world in which English is an official language and is used in education, are left out more or less completely: Anglophone Africa (except South Africa), and India and Pakistan.

Besides target-language countries, other countries and regions are also referred to. Vietnam, Fiji, Thailand, Cambodia and Nepal are mentioned in passing in connection with a backpacker’s travels. And there are indirect references to Japan (manga, karate, Pearl Harbor, atomic bombs), France (parkour), Holland (double Dutch) and Norway (the Nobel Peace Prize). But large areas are left out although English may be used as a lingua franca in some contexts all over the world: The whole of Latin America, China and most of Asia outside China, including Russia and the Middle East. Last, but not least, continental Europe is hardly mentioned at all, although English is the preferred lingua franca in most of Europe and one of the most important working languages in EU institutions. Denmark, as the country of learning, is very seldom mentioned.

So, although *A Piece of Cake* mentions a large number of countries and regions in the world, it clearly favours the Western world, and it has large blind spots: the whole of Latin America, most of Africa, large parts of Asia, and continental Europe. It should be stressed that the point is not that the textbook should cover still more countries, but that it is relevant and important to be aware of the selection of countries and take up discussions of what constitutes a fair selection if one is interested in the image of the world as a whole.

Another characteristic of the image of the world in this textbook is that it is entirely focused on the contemporary world. There is practically no historical information on any of the countries or regions, except some information on American Indians in the United States. So, there is no explanation of the fact that English is used on many continents today.

The image of the world in the French textbook, *Français Formidable*, is very different. This is not only related to the obvious fact that the focus is on the French-speaking world rather than the English-speaking. The approach to knowledge about the world is much more systematic and globally oriented, and it includes both geography and history. Some facts and stories are given in French in the textbook for the students, others are given in longer texts in Danish in the teacher’s guide.

*Français Formidable* has several chapters on France (not only Paris), dealing with geography, history, and aspects of society and culture: tourism, agriculture, industry, political and administrative system, school system, religion, and national symbols. There are also chapters on *la Francophonie en Europe* (Belgium, *la Suisse Romande*, Luxemburg), and on *la Francophonie dans le monde* and *la France dans le monde*, with descriptions of Senegal, Québec, Martinique, Algeria, Morocco, Réunion, and with references to Haïti, Ivory Coast and Mali, and brief references to Maghreb and Tunisia (in connection with the Arab spring). There are also references to countries that are not French-

speaking: South Africa, Italy, Afghanistan and Somalia (in connection with Doctors Without Borders), and Greece, Scandinavia, Australia, USA and Canada in general (in connection with future plans of travels). Moreover, there is a map of the world giving the French names of many countries and oceans, including countries that are not French-speaking.

Thus, *Français Formidable* is much more oriented towards the whole world, and towards Africa, than *A Piece of Cake*, and includes some basic knowledge about society and history. It also has a small section on the two phases of French colonisations in the world. Are there blind spots in *Français Formidable*? Well, one might say that certain countries in the Middle East (e.g. Egypt, Lebanon) and Southeast Asia (e.g. Vietnam, Cambodia) have colonial links to France, and this could have been mentioned. But as in the case of English, the most important is to be aware of the selection as an act of inclusion and exclusion. French is a world language that is known and taught in many corners of the Earth, and this is an important message to the students.

### **Citizenship education studies: are key problems of the world represented?**

Citizenship education studies primarily sees the world as characterised by *a number of key problems* that (should) concern practically everybody, such as climate change, inequality and poverty. In this approach, intercultural learning is primarily seen as the development of the student into an engaged (national and global) citizen with some political awareness. Citizenship education studies has been a focus of interest in parts of the field of language and intercultural education since the 1990s (Byram 1997, Byram et al. 2017).

There are many possible key problems that may be taken up in the textbooks, cf., for example, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, formulated in 2015. As this approach presupposes some political awareness among the students, and possibly action as well, textbooks influenced by this approach may contain chapters or sections that serve to enhance students' knowledge about political institutions such as international human rights associations, social movements, political parties, unions, etc.

So, the question is: What image of the world does the textbook offer in terms of representation of key problems of the contemporary world? Is this dimension present in the textbook at all?

In *A Piece of Cake*, there is nothing about political institutions such as political systems (republic, constitutional monarchy, other), parliaments, governments, political parties, the roles of regions or provinces, the constitutional role of religion, the role of the different kinds of media, organisations of civil society. The political in the institutional sense is hinted at only indirectly by way of celebrities: Winston Churchill, Barack Obama, Queen Victoria. The EU, the UN and the Commonwealth are not mentioned. The key problems represented in *A Piece of Cake* favour the individual's engagement without necessarily entering collective action.

There is a chapter on the environment, consisting of a number of (non-connected) texts of different genres, for example: A poem with the title 'One Day the Lights Went Out'; an informative text explaining the term and the movement 'Earth Day'; a list of energy tips: What can we do to save energy?; and a text on the hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and how Brad Pitt helped people rebuild their neighbourhood. On the website are supplementary materials on Greenpeace and the Rainbow Warrior, on The Eden Project, on the Tiger and on the Giant Panda, and a text on the Australian rain forests. The view of environmental problems is quite fragmented as there are no connections between the different inputs.

There is also a chapter on food, which focuses on self-improvement with respect to health. On the other hand, there is not much about such key problems as inequality, poverty and wealth, unemployment, social exclusion, and social and religious conflict. War, crime and terrorism are sometimes



briefly represented, though: World War II is mentioned several times, and school shootings and the September 11 attacks. There is almost no mention of migration and no mention of refugees.

The aspects of the problems that presuppose collective action by large actors in the world – states, cities, companies, organisations, etc. are not emphasised. The focus is on what the individual young person can do in everyday life: save energy, remove rubbish, improve one's health, etc. The students are seen as citizens, but primarily in an individualised and a-political manner.

In the German textbook, *Du bist dran*, there is a more collective and sometimes more overt political understanding of the role of the engaged citizen.

The focus in *Du bist dran* is clearly on knowledge about Germany, with single chapters on Austria and Switzerland. There is a chapter on multicultural Germany (*Multikulti*), in which racism is briefly mentioned. And there is, as in *A Piece of Cake*, a chapter on environmental problems, in which two themes are dealt with: rubbish in the home and rubbish dumps, and smoking and air pollution. There is also a chapter on World War II seen with the eyes of ordinary people in Germany and Eastern Europe.

The largest chapter on societal issues is a chapter entitled *Mach mit!* [Take part/will you join us?]. The first part has the title '*Engagement für eine bessere Welt*' [Engagement for a better world], and it contains self-descriptions of five young people: Andreas, who is a youth football trainer; Sabine, who is a member of an Amnesty International youth group; Johannes, who is active in the German party CDU (Christian Democratic Union); Elisabeth, who is engaged in her group of friends; and Kathrin, who has taken part in the demonstrations against the building of a motorway through the centre of Berlin. The next part is a text on boys in a fitness centre, and the next focuses on a class who has invited the punk musician Bela B to take part in a classroom discussion on right-wing extremism and Nazis. The section includes a piece of lyrics made by Bela B's band (*Die Ärzte* [The Doctors]), on right-wing extremism: '*Schrei nach Liebe*' [Cry for Love]. The last part tells about a journey to the forests of tropical Africa, organized by the World Wildlife Fund, to visit gorillas and elephants.

Both textbooks are interested in making students aware that there are key problems in society and the world, and see students as active citizens (and this, by the way, also goes for *Français Formidable*). Both textbooks point to problems related to the environment. But *Du bist dran* may be said to direct the attention more to political engagement together with others, by focusing on concern with right-wing activities in Germany, and by mentioning participation in large demonstrations against a motorway.

### **Cultural studies: which cultural and social identities are represented?**

Cultural studies primarily sees the world as *a scene for multitudes of people with different and changing identities*. It may be cultural identities like social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, language, race, religion, education, age, etc., or it may be social identities like teachers, business people, workers, farmers, celebrities, refugees, engineers, school children, homeless, journalists, etc.). In this approach, intercultural learning is primarily seen as becoming acquainted with, meet and communicate with people who may be more or less different from oneself. Cultural studies has been taken up by some representatives of the field of language and intercultural education, among them Guilherme 2002, Holliday et al. 2004, Kramsch 1993, Risager 2007.

Cultural studies focuses on the role of culture in contemporary society with special emphasis on relations between culture, identity and politics. It is interested in how cultural practices of any group, organisation or institution are influenced by and in turn influence power relations. Cultural studies is

also interested in subjectivity and historicity, i.e. how we become subjects as a consequence of our social and cultural life history and as part of larger historical processes.

In the Cultural studies tradition, 'culture' is not seen as something that exists out there and can be described as norms and values, products and practices (an essentialist view). As the Cultural studies tradition accentuates process and agency, it favours a view of culture that presupposes that it is constructed in discourse (a non-essentialist view): Culture is not something that can be used to *explain* people's norms and values, culture is what should be *explained*. For example, why does a specific discourse about 'culture' exist in a certain context, and what does this discourse do? (Risager 2018: 130) A similar distinction can be found in the study of identity: The focus is not on fixed identities as group memberships, but on processes of identification of self and Other: Who identify whom in space and time and with what effects? – not only in interactions between people, but also in discourses in society about race, class, gender, age, nationality, religion, language etc. Some scholars focus on 'intersectional studies', i.e. studies of the variability of intersecting identities, for example: poor white males, black female academics, young Muslim women, etc.

So, the question is: What image of the world does the textbook offer in terms of representations of cultural and social identities? Are there significant blind spots? And what is its view of culture and identity (an essentialist or a non-essentialist view)?

In *A Piece of Cake*, the majority of people represented in texts and images are young people at the same age of the students or a bit older. There are also some adults but almost no children. Among the older adults, mostly presidents, queens and Native American chiefs are represented. Among the young people and adults there are both females and males, but the balance depends on the theme: For instance, in a chapter on music, and in a chapter on Space, there are almost no females. As for sexuality, the chapter on Ireland includes a non-fiction text on the life of Oscar Wilde with a short comment on homosexuality. On the other hand, there are no chapters dealing with gender or sexuality as a social dimension of society or schools.

As regards ethnic and racial diversity, there is an important difference in the treatment of the UK (London) and Ireland on one side, and the USA (New York and Hawaii) on the other side. The chapters on London and Ireland only show white people, and there is no mention of ethnicity, race and racism in the UK and Ireland. So, there is a blind spot here. On the other hand, cultural diversity in general is celebrated as far as New York and Hawaii are concerned. But there is no treatment of race in the United States, and no interest in the situation of African Americans in the past decades. Moreover, Hispanics are not mentioned at all. So, *A Piece of Cake* has a blind spot of a different kind here.

Religion is mentioned several times: Many branches of Christianity (Catholicism, Baptism, Puritanism – but not Anglicanism) and also Judaism, Hinduism and aboriginal religions. Buddhism is not mentioned. Islam today is not mentioned either, although it is a world religion that is also present in English-speaking countries. Here there is another significant blind spot in *A Piece of Cake*.

As to social identities like professions etc., the world of *A Piece of Cake* is of course influenced by the fact that the students are 13-16 years of age and mostly know about adult life (outside their own neighbourhood) through the Internet, the social media and the mass media, which are, in a country like Denmark, dominated by entertainment and celebrities. The celebrities present in *A Piece of Cake* are of different kinds: Political leaders (presidents, kings and queens), athletes and people active in showbiz, fiction writers – the authors of the numerous literary texts, and scientists and astronauts. There are also texts depicting poor people (in a village in India, in an English town near Liverpool, and on a Native American reservation in the US), and texts about victims of violence and disasters (September 11, Hiroshima, Pearl Harbor, Titanic). On the other hand, there are few 'ordinary' working-class or middle-class jobs represented, and no disabled or sick persons – which is two more blind spots in the image of the world in *A Piece of Cake*.

*A Piece of Cake* uses the words ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ very little, and mostly in connection with ‘Native American culture’ vs. ‘white American culture’. But even if the authors are interested in depicting diversity and change, there is a general lack of awareness of the distinction between essentialism and non-essentialism in the textbook.

*Français Formidable* presents an image of the world that is socially and culturally a bit more diverse. Like *A Piece of Cake*, it has a blind spot when it comes to working-class people, but it treats ethnic diversity, migration, racism and cultural hybridity, and includes Islam among religions mentioned.

The people represented in *Français Formidable* are, naturally, mostly young people. There are very few smaller children or babies (except the Infant Jesus), there are some adults, mostly parents, and very few older people. The sexes are more or less equal in numbers across the different chapters, and when the family of the young people represented is mentioned, it is heterosexual and sometimes divorced. There is no discussion of gender or sexuality.

French society is generally represented as ethnically and racially diverse. Drawings and photos show mostly Caucasian/white people with black or blond hair, but also a number of more clearly African/black types. There are almost no Asians, except a person from (probably) Vietnam. Immigrants in France are described as coming from the wider French-speaking area, but not from outside this area. Thus, migration is seen as a phenomenon going on within the borders of the francophone world. The sections on Belgium, Switzerland and Luxemburg are very short and do not mention ethnic diversity or migration, and the sections on francophone countries outside Europe do not mention migration either.

There is a chapter called ‘*Être différent*’ [Being different], containing the following, among others: portrait photos of six young people of different sex, skin colour, hair colour and facial decoration; a poem/song by the tennis player and musician Yannick Noah: ‘*Je suis métis*’ [I am metis]; a text where some young people tell about their associations with the expression ‘*Un SDF*’ [a homeless person]. The chapter focuses on identity issues related to appearance, race and class, and may open up for many reflections.

Religion is included, and the relative percentages are given concerning three religions in France: Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam. We see some Muslim men praying, and in another place a girl identifies herself as a Muslim. There is no mention of the debates on the hijab and the like in France, and there is no photo or drawing representing women who are veiled in some way. On the other hand, there is a chapter on how (Catholic) Christmas is celebrated in France, and there are two Christmas Carols.

As to social identities in the adult world, *Français Formidable* is dominated by everyday roles as parents, teachers, shop assistants, people in the streets, including tourists. There is a photographer and a dentist and a painter. The social focus is on middle-class young people. But there are exceptions, particularly in the chapter on *Être différent*. Other exceptions are a chapter on food, where there is a text on *les Restos du Cœur* [Restaurants of the Heart] and their work for poor people and families, and the chapter on plans for the future, in which there is a section on Doctors Without Borders and its work all over the world, with examples from Haïti (the earthquake), South Africa (AIDS), Italy (refugees from Africa), Somalia (malnutrition) and Afghanistan (the war).

As *A Piece of Cake*, *Français Formidable* uses the words ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ very little. But especially in the chapter on *Être différent*, there is an intention of raising the awareness of how individuals and groups in society see each other and themselves, how power is an aspect of the processes of identity, and how people can live with cultural hybridity – a non-essentialistic view of identity. Neither *A Piece of Cake*, nor *Du bist dran* nor *Caminando* exhibit this Cultural-studies view of identity.

### Postcolonial studies: are aspects of world history represented?

Postcolonial studies primarily sees the world as characterised by *inequalities due to colonialism and imperialism*, and intercultural learning is primarily seen as gaining an insight into world history and developing historical awareness concerning the role of the past for the our world today. Postcolonial studies have not been an area of focus for many in the field of language and intercultural education, but a few may be mentioned: Canagarajah 1999, Kramsch & Vinall 2015, Pennycook 1998.

Postcolonial studies is especially interested in the heritage of colonialism and imperialism. It takes take up identity problematics in countries or regions that are in a process of decolonisation after having been colonised for a longer or shorter period, and it has always emphasised the importance of considering the power dimensions of knowledge and culture in historiography and in historical awareness: Who represents whom under what circumstances? Who purports to know what about whom, and why? One of the central concepts is ‘orientalism’, the ideological tendency in the West to create an ‘us-them’ dichotomy between ‘the West’ and ‘the East’, and to perceive ‘the East’ as backward or irrational. Many people in the field of postcolonial studies would maintain that there is a close connection between racism and colonialism, and that racism today is an after-effect of colonial and post-colonial history.

So, the question is: What image of the world does the textbook offer in terms of the colonial and postcolonial history of target-language countries? Is this dimension present in the textbook at all?

As said above, in *A Piece of Cake*, there is almost no mention of history at all (except the fate of Native Americans), so students do not gain any knowledge about the British Empire and the Commonwealth (a blind spot). *Français Formidable* makes a different choice and offers students some information about French colonisations. *Du bist dran* has a chapter on German history in Europe, but it does not mention that the German Empire had colonies in Africa until after World War I – which would have linked German history more to the global context.

The Spanish textbook, *Caminando*, deals mostly with Spain, but also gives a short overview of the countries of South and Central America, and includes sections on Nicaragua, Cuba and some Spanish speakers in New York. The perspective is clearly Spanish. *Caminando* only offers students minute inputs that can support and enlarge their knowledge about the historical spread of Spanish (at the expense of other languages), and about the world in terms of historically-developed global power relations and in terms of racial hierarchies. *Caminando* presents the colonial and recent histories of Nicaragua and Cuba within the frame of Spanish colonisation at large, but does not say a word about the effects of conquest and colonisation on life and culture in Spain and the important role of Spain in Europe, not least in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. There is nothing about the history of Spain in Europe after 1492 (a blind spot). Although parts of this history are very controversial, for example, the Spanish civil war and the Franco regime, they could have been hinted at, maybe in the Danish text.

### Transnational studies: are links between different parts of the world represented?

Transnational studies primarily sees the world as characterised by *processes and practices cutting across national borders*, and intercultural learning is primarily seen as the development of an understanding of the (complex and conflictual) interdependence of all regions of the Earth. This approach has been elaborated by Kumaravadivelu 2008, and by myself in, among others, Risager 2007.

Processes and practices are, of course, of many kinds, and include modern transnational relationships like the great powers’ battle for influence in Africa, Central Asia, Latin America and the Arctic. For analytical purposes, I propose to distinguish between four kinds:

- transnational infrastructure and communication: railroads, airlines, communication satellites, phone, Internet, social media.
- transnational mobility: tourism, migration, refugees, diasporas.
- transnational organisations: companies, associations, communities, networks.
- transnational flows of ideas, discourses and practices: democracy, terrorism, music, drugs.

So, the question is: What image of the world does the textbook offer in terms of transnational links between different parts of the world? Is this dimension present in the textbook at all?

All four textbooks are basically characterised by a national approach to the world: All countries are almost always treated in total isolation from other countries. There are some efforts, though, to point to transnational practices, especially by way of references to organisations like Doctors Without Borders, Amnesty International, the WWF and the like. Transnational migration is also sometimes referred to.

Only *A Piece of Cake* stands out here because it includes a chapter called ‘Global connections’. It contains, among others, the song ‘Imagine’ by John Lennon; a photo assemblage, entitled ‘Globalization – like it or not!’, of smiling young Indian women using phones and laptops together, surrounded by statements related to globalisation, such as “Restrictive governments can no longer stop information from reaching us” and “Jobs are being outsourced - causing unemployment at home”; an informative text on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO); a constructed interview about Vietnam with a ‘global teenager’, a 19-year-old Brit who has travelled for nine months around North America, Vancouver, Fiji, Australia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Nepal; and a short informative text on World of Warcraft (WOW), an MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game).

The kinds of global connections that are focused on in *A Piece of Cake*, are connections between individual people by way of travelling, migration and digital communication, practices that lead to cultural encounters in real life or in virtual reality. It should be added that on the website related to this chapter, the theme of English as a world language is taken up. But the term English as a lingua franca is not introduced in the textbook.

## Conclusion

Language textbooks are not only tools for learning a specific language, they also serve as windows to the world. Dialogues, visuals and written texts usually refer to *something* in the world. Of course, the term ‘world’ may be given widely different meanings, e.g. ‘the inner world of each of us’, ‘the local context’, ‘the target-language countries’, or ‘the whole planet’.

In the present article, we have chosen to emphasise the whole planet, for two reasons. One has to do with the relationship between language teaching and real life going on outside the teaching context, the other has to do with the image of language studies among young people (in Denmark, and probably elsewhere).

Real complex life today is often influenced by processes of economic and cultural globalisation. The expressed aim of language teaching may still be to work with a *national language* and its associated *national culture*. But when we look at actual life in different locations and situations in the target-language countries, it is often characterised by globalisation processes. In places like a street in a city, a beach, a supermarket, or a college, there may be imported consumer goods of many sorts, there may be people from different countries, and on people’s phones there may be video clips from different places and in different languages. A location that is perhaps represented in the textbook as

a place illustrating national life, may in reality reveal itself to be a microcosmos illustrating the integration of cultural flows from other parts of the world. Life in this location may have certain national characteristics (some social norms, language use, typical food, etc.), but it is also *transnational*. The present article is an argument for the position that the whole field of language teaching could gain from orienting itself more towards the real, diverse and interdependent world, already from beginners' level.

The second reason for emphasising the whole planet has to do with the importance of convincing young people of the importance of choosing language studies as (a part of) their career. Some years ago, I overheard two students in Denmark (age about 20) discussing their choices of subjects. One of them said: 'I don't want to be locked up in French studies'. These students are generally very internationally oriented, so what should be done to attract them to language studies? This article takes the position that not only French studies, but all language studies, including English, can gain from taking the whole world as part of departure. All countries are players on the world scene, and many locations exhibit combinations of the national and the transnational. Thus, language studies should have a *global identity*, while not losing sight of the importance of knowledge about target-language countries and national identities.

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## Appendix

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