Local and International Cultures in Catalan as a Second Language Textbooks

Pau Bori

Faculty of Philology
Department of Iberian Studies
University of Belgrade, Serbia

Contact : paubori@gmail.com

Abstract

This study focuses on specific elements of local and international cultures in two of the most widely used textbook collections for Catalan as a second language (CSL). Adapting a methodology used by Ramirez & Hall (1990), the study first gives quantitative analysis of the geographical references to Catalonia and the rest of the world in form of a large text (more than 50 words) or an image.

The results show that Catalan culture is favored over international cultures, but that, in most cases, textbooks give a simplified view on both Catalan and international cultures. Catalonia and several other countries are often presented from a tourist-consumer point of view, without any substantial cultural information. Furthermore, the study suggests that textbooks avoid cultural comparisons therefore, giving little space for cultural understanding. The results presented in this paper form part of a wider research about the sociocultural models that current CSL textbooks transmit.

Local and International Cultures in Catalan as a Second Language Textbooks

The aim of this article is to examine how local and international cultures are presented in textbooks designed for adult learners of Catalan as a second language (CSL). As its starting point, this study takes the view that the textbooks are never neutral (Apple, 1999) and that CSL textbooks give learners a biased version of a culture international and their host country's culture.

Since Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, cultural aspects have increasingly been incorporated to second language (L2) pedagogy. The relation between L2 learning and culture has been acknowledged in the works of Kramsch (1993), Byram (1997), and Moran (2001), among others.

The increased emphasis on teaching culture in recent decades has led to the introduction of cultural elements in most textbooks (Santos, 2007). Several researches (Alptekin, 1993; Batteman & Mattos, 2006; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Ramirez & Hall, 1990; Risager, 1991; among others) have analyzed the cultural component of second language textbooks. However, textbooks for learning Catalan as a second language have rarely been a subject of any kind of analysis, especially one that takes a socio-cultural perspective.

Statement of the problem

This article is just an initial step in the direction of analyzing constructions of culture in CSL textbooks following the four dimensions of analyzing culture proposed by Byram & Esarte-Sarries (1991):
- analysis at the micro-social level of the social identity of individuals, of their social environment, of their personality.

- analysis at the macro-social level of socio-economic, geographic and historical representations.
- analysis of the viewpoint taken by the author, either explicitly or implicitly.
- analysis at the inter-cultural level of mutual representations and recognition by the nature and foreign cultures (p.180).

In this paper, the focus will be on the macro-social level of socio-economic, and more specifically on geographic representations that appear in textbooks. To this end, this study will try to answer the following research questions:

1. What type of representation of local and international culture appears in large texts and images that refer to a geographical reference?
2. What are the differences and similarities in representations of local and international cultures?

Methodology

Corpus

Three criteria for the selection of textbooks were followed:

1) that they are widely used;
2) recent;
3) and for A1 to B1 levels.

Two collections from two different publishing houses from Barcelona were analyzed:

1. *Veus 1, 2, 3* (Mas & Vilagrassa, 2005-2008)
2. *Nou Nivell Bàsic 1, 2, 3* (Guerrero, Mercadal, Roig, & Rovira, 2010) a*nd*

*Nou Nivell Elemental 1, 2, 3 (*Anguera, Roig, Tomàs, & Verdugo, 2010)

Procedure

The methodology used for this study was adapted from Ramirez & Hall (1990). First, every large text and image that refers to a Catalan or a non-Catalan geographical reference was counted. Then, the content and form of each image and large text was briefly described so that it could be later grouped into bigger categories. Finally, the qualitative analysis of the results was conducted.

For the purpose of this analysis, we considered a large text to contain greater than 50 words of narrative text or dialogue; images included all photographs, maps and drawings that were related to geographical references.

Results

Large texts

The number of large texts referring to Catalonia is almost the double the amount of large texts that refer to non-Catalan countries.

Table 1. Large texts in collections *Veus* and *Nou Nivell Bàsic/Elemental*

	CATALONIA	NON CATALAN COUNTRIES	TOTAL
Tourist information	12	6	18
Journeys	2	12	14
Brief news	7	4	11
Cultural information	9	-	9
Reports	7	-	7
Everyday life	2	-	2
TOTAL	39	22	61

Among texts that refer to Catalan territories, the most predominant category is tourist information, followed by cultural information, brief news, and reports.

The texts belonging to the category tourist information are more or less impersonal texts that contain tourist information about a place. These texts resemble those usually found in a travel magazine or guide. Cultural information contain information about geography, demography, culture, or language of a place. The brief news category includes texts about news that happened immediately before the text was written, while reports are much longer and have no relation to latest news.

Among large texts referring to non-Catalan countries, the most prevalent category is journeys, as can be seen in Table 1. They are texts that different authors wrote to explain their experience about a journey. This category also includes texts recommending to go to a place.
Of the large texts that refer to non-Catalan countries, we did not find any belonging to the cultural information, reports, or everyday life categories.

Images

As we can see in Table 2, we found more images of Catalonia than images of non-Catalan countries. In both cases, the majority of images are similar to picture postcards. However, among the images representing Catalan culture, we found a wider variety of content. Apart from postcards and maps, we found a significant number of pictures of institutions (city councils, parliament, museums, cinemas) and establishments (popular bars, shops, bakeries) in Catalonia, that were not found in images representing non Catalan countries. Apart from the aforementioned categories, news photography and travel photos also had a significant presence.

Table 2. Images in collections *Veus* and *Nou Nivell Bàsic/Elemental*

	CATALONIA	NON CATALAN COUNTRIES	TOTAL
POSTCARDS	39	36	75
MAPS	16	3	19
INSTITUTIONS	13	-	13
NEWS PHOTGRAPHY	2	7	9
ESTABLISHMENTS	8	-	8
TRAVEL PHOTOS	3	4	7
OTHERS	6	-	6
DRAWINGS	-	4	4
ARTISTIC PHOTGRAPHY	1	-	1
TOTAL	88	54	142

Discussion

Large texts

Tourist information. For both Catalonia and non-Catalan countries, most large texts fell into the tourist information category. These kinds of texts most resemble the ones found in travel magazines or brochures in which the idealization of a certain tourist destination is the primary objective. This ideal representation of place is in keeping with current trends for most second language textbooks (Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991).

In texts about Catalan territories we find more detailed and extended information than in the texts about tourism in non-Catalan territories. For example, in texts about Catalan territories we find information about accommodation, restaurants, history, and traditions, which are absent in large texts about non Catalan countries.

Of note, these texts appear to be written for primarily wealthy tourists, especially when promoting non-Catalan countries. A text about the Caribbean islands read, "The best way to go from one island to the other is, without a doubt, in a comfortable and luxurious yacht" (*Veus 3*, p. 13).

Journeys. Unlike the neutral tourist information texts, journeys mostly describe personal travels. The great majority of texts about non-Catalan territories belong to this category, while only two texts belonging to this category talk about Catalan countries.

After the analysis of the 12 "journey" texts dedicated to non-Catalan countries, we found that they present mainly a Western perspective. The majority of them focus only on the tourist attractions in the country; information about its' people or culture is very scarce. Moreover, the texts are not written from a local perspective and are often stereotyped.

The texts that give a little bit more information about the people and countries are ones dedicated to India, Burkina Faso and Mongolia. In text portraying a Catalan tourist giving advice to a friend going to India, this country is mentioned as "a very poor country" (*Veus 3,* pp.16-17) We also read: "you should know that there will always be a lot of people surrounding you, but don't worry, the country is not dangerous" (*Veus 3*, pp.16-17).

Similarly, in the text about a NGO volunteer in Burkina Faso, we find that, "Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the World" (*Veus 3*, p.115) and, again in the similar fashion like in the text about India, that "the people from here are not violent at all" (*Veus 3*, p.115).

The text about Mongolia is about a Catalan cyclist (Xavi) on a tour through the country and his experience after his bicycle breaks. This text consists of complaints Xavi makes about certain elements of (Mongolian)

life. At the beginning of the text, he discovers that there are no scheduled buses to take him to his destination so he must hire a personal driver who fails to meet him at the agreed upon time. When he finally boards the minibus, he is surprised by the lack of space. He says: "we're on our way with two drivers sitting in front …and twelve, yes twelve people in the back" (*Nou Nivell Elemental 2*, p. 36). Xavi also writes about the reaction of Mongolians to this, from his perspective, very unpleasant situation. In his words: "The Mongolian (students) are supporting it with incredible stoicism, with radio cassette playing Mongolian music and them singing together as if going on an excursion" (*Nou Nivell Elemental 2*, p. 36). Xavi fails to understand the reasons behind some of the social and cultural practices of people different from him. Instead, he views the Mongolians with an air of superiority from a distance giving only his own opinion. It would certainly be interesting to read how the Mongolians saw the actions of Xavi and learn their perspective of the events. However, neither in these journey texts nor in the other categories do we find a single example of cultural comparisons.

Brief news and reports. There are a total of 11 texts belonging to category brief news for both Catalan and non-Catalan countries. The majority of news is about natural disasters, accidents, robberies, etc. These texts are very brief with the basic news information.

On the other hand, the report texts are much longer than brief news and contain more detailed information. All reports refer to Catalonia. The majority of them are in the same textbook regarding charismatic establishments in Barcelona (*Veus 2*). They contain information about current establishments and some detail about the history of these places.

Unlike all other texts analysed, reports contain a degree of dialogicality, because they include different voices. For example, the text about the last town crier in a small village in Catalonia (*Veus 2*, p. 98)

includes not only the voice of the author of the text, but also the voices of the town crier and the mayor of the village.

Cultural information. All the texts belonging to this category discuss Catalan countries. They are mainly texts which are addressed to non-Catalan speakers with basic information about Catalan language and dialects, Catalan geography, and Catalan institutions which may be relevant for foreigners in Catalonia such as the Catalan Consortium for Linguistic Normalization, the biggest institution for learning Catalan language.

Images

The majority of images belonging to both Catalan and non-Catalan territories fall into the postcard category. They are high-quality images of beautiful places intended for tourists. In these pictures, we see spectacular nature or famous monuments like the Sagrada Família in Barcelona or Big Ben in London.

Although the postcard category is the largest one in both Catalan and non-Catalan countries, the vision of Catalonia is more developed because there are a significant number of images that belong to other categories like maps, pictures of institutions, or establishments.

Non-Catalan countries are presented almost always as ideal images of the countryside. For example, one unit dedicated to tourism abroad opens with a large photograph of two British tourists on the top of a 4x4 land cruiser looking through their binoculars to the distance (*Veus 3*, pp. 6-7). They are obviously on a safari trip, but symbolically, this image gives an idea of how non-Western cultures are portrayed in these textbooks.

A significant exception is a large photograph of African women and children standing in front something which could be an aid camp or a field hospital (*Veus 3*, pp. 112-113). Textbooks portraying Africans in this

manner reinforces stereotypes like poverty, lacking modernity, backwardness, and so on. In both this picture and some large texts about non-Western countries, including Mongolia, India, or Burkina Faso, we have seen a trend to present the other, non-Western cultures and people, as "being distant, different, absent or more or less subtly inferior to us Europeans" (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 63).

Conclusions

In general, Catalan and international territories are portrayed from a tourist and consumer point of view. Both texts and images place emphasis on tourist destinations that are represented in an idealized and superficial way. The information that we have about cultures and local people is very scarce.

The results show that Catalan culture is favored over international cultures. The information found in the large texts dedicated to Catalonia is more substantial than the information about foreign countries which are represented exclusively as tourist destinations. Similarly, we found different types of images of Catalonia (postcards, maps, pictures of establishments and institutions), whereas the great majority of the images of non-Catalan countries resemble postcards. Moreover, while is possible to hear the voices of different Catalan people in texts, there is a lack of a foreign voice in the texts.

The texts and images about non-Catalan countries contain stereotypical representations of these countries and were written for a well-to-do Catalan tourist with a feeling of subtle superiority over non-Western foreign countries and cultures. The analyzed CSL textbooks avoided cultural comparisons, therefore giving little space for cultural understanding and failing to promote intercultural competence among students.

References

Alptekin, C. (1993). Target-language culture in EFL materials. *ELT journal*, *47*(2), 136-143. doi: 10.1093/elt/47.2.136

Apple, M. (1999). Cultural politics and the text. In M. Apple. (Ed.), *Official Knowledge*: *Democratic education in a conservative age* (pp. 42–60)*.* 2nd editon. New York: Routledge,.

Anguera, X., Roig, M., Tomàs, N., & Verdugo, M. (2010). *Nou Nivell Elemental 1, 2, 3*. Barcelona: Castellnou.

Batteman, B., & Mattos, M. (2006). An Analysis of the Cultural Content of Six Portuguese Textbooks. *Portuguese Language Journal*, *1*.

Byram, M. & Esarte-Sarries, V. (1991). *Investigating Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Teaching*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied linguistics*, *1*(1).

Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1999). Cultural mirrors: Materials and methods in the EFL classroom. *Culture in second language teaching and learning*, 196-219.

Guerrero, I., Mercadal, T., Roig, M., & Rovira, M. (2010a). *Nou Nivell Bàsic 1, 2, 3*. Barcelona: Castellnou.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mas, M., Vilagrassa, A. (2005-2008). *Veus 1, 2, 3.* Barcelona: PAMSA.

Moran, P. (2001). *Teaching culture: Perspectives in practice*. New York: Heinle & Heinle.

Santos, D. (2007). Reconceptualizing textbooks in culture teaching. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, *11*(1), 36.

Ramirez, A. G., & Hall, J. K. (1990). Language and culture in secondary level Spanish textbooks. *The Modern Language Journal*, *74*(1), 48-65. doi:10.1111/j.1540 -4781.1990.tb02553.x

Risager, K. (1991). Cultural references in European textbooks: an evaluation of recent tendencies. In Buttjes, D. and Byram, M. (eds.) *Mediating Languages and Cultures* (pp. 181-192). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Van Dijk, T. (2005). *Racism and discourse in Spain and Latin America* (Vol. 14). Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.