

Block, D. and J. Gray (forthcoming 2017) 'French language textbooks as ideologically imbued cultural artefacts: Political economy, neoliberalism and (self) branding', in Coffey, S. and U. Wingate (eds.) *New Directions for Research in Foreign Language Education*. Abingdon: Routledge.

David Block and John Gray

Introduction

Traditionally, research and scholarship on foreign language teaching and learning (i.e. the teaching and learning of languages other than English around the world) has tended to be very much nation-state-based and the focus has tended to be on curricular issues, such as decisions about content (culture, lexis and grammar) and classroom practices, as well as cognitive-linguistic learning processes. Notably missing has been adequate attention to the economic, political, social, cultural and historical backdrop of FL classrooms. This kind of social sciences obliviousness has, to a great extent, kept FL studies outside of mainstream Applied Linguistics and separate from English language teaching and learning research. In the latter field, disciplinary crossings have been very much in evidence over the past several decades and they have enriched the field immensely. We believe that FL teaching and learning needs to move in the same direction and this chapter offers a modest attempt at doing just this.

In this chapter, we focus on a key language curriculum issue, the textbooks used in classrooms, from a political economic perspective. In previous publications, we have taken a similar tack. Thus in Block (2010) and Gray (2010a, 2010b, 2012), there are critiques of how many of the activities in English language textbooks constitute celebrations of neoliberal ideology via their portrayals of empowered cosmopolitan elites as self-branded individuals who seem to spend most of their time traveling, using new technologies and consuming. Meanwhile, in a more recent publication (Gray and Block, 2014), we have shifted our focus somewhat, examining the representations of working class people in English textbooks published between 1970 and 2010.

In this chapter, we return to the notion of self-branding, developing this construct in conjunction with recent work on how neoliberalism impacts on individual and collective subjectivities. Examining the carrier content of two recent editions of a French language textbook, *Édito, Niveau B2* (Brillant, Bazou, Racine and Schenker 2010; Heu and Mabile 2015), we highlight and analyse the ways in which activities in these books construct real and idealised/aspirational French-speaking identities which are aligned with the notion of the 'neoliberal citizen' (Brown 2005) and the practice of 'self-branding' (Peters 2008).

Focusing on books published fairly recently allows us to examine how neoliberal discourses are still dominant despite the current economic depression, which by most estimations was caused by neoliberal policies from the 1980s onwards (Crouch, 2011; Duménil and Lévy 2011). It also allows us to further make the point that this type of inquiry is important because it shows how language teaching materials are ideologically-loaded, reflecting particular views of society and the individuals within them at different points in history. Finally, we hope that this chapter will serve as a corrective to those who see French language textbooks as ideologically neutral, or as innocuous mediators of French language learning.

We begin with two sections to situate our discussion, providing first of all a short history of language textbook analysis, before moving to consider key concepts undergirding our analysis. We then briefly discuss our methodology before moving to the analysis of activities appearing in the two aforementioned books.

A short history of language textbook analysis

The recent history of textbook analysis in the area of second and foreign language teaching and learning consists of three separate but interrelated strands which are linked to developments in the following domains: English language teaching; modern foreign languages teaching; and research in applied linguistics. In this section we look at each of these in turn and show how textbook analysis evolved from being essentially a teacherly activity concerned with the selection and evaluation of materials to becoming an established area of academic research in an increasingly interdisciplinary and critical applied linguistics.

We begin with the rapid expansion of English language teaching globally in the late 1960s and the growth of the publishing industry designed to service a burgeoning market with a wide range of educational products. One of the most lucrative and widely disseminated items produced by this industry was the textbook. Our rationale for beginning with English language teaching is that it is here that textbook analysis was first systematised for language teachers. With the profusion of courses on offer it became necessary for teachers, or those with the power to make textbook selections on their behalf, to be given the means to do so in as principled and as efficient a way as possible. The most common approach to this was through the examination of the textbook against a pre-determined checklist of characteristics deemed essential. Such checklists began to appear in the 1960s (e.g. Rivers 1968) and proliferated throughout the 1980s, reflecting the growth of the literature aimed at language teachers (e.g. Cunningsworth 1984; Sheldon 1988). What these checklists (some rudimentary; some more elaborated) had in common was that they allowed for the kind of analysis required for selection or evaluation by end users. They were also highly normative, reflecting the beliefs of their writers about the nature and scope of language teaching and learning.

Rivers (1968) provides a typical early example of such a checklist consisting of seven categories, each of which was accompanied by a set of questions designed to guide teacher selection and evaluation of textbooks. Rivers's categories, along with some example questions, look as follows (all italics in original):

- A. Appropriateness for local situation (e.g. 'Is the material of a kind that would *interest* students at the level and of the age you have in mind?' p. 478);
- B. Appropriateness for teacher and students (e.g. 'On what *method* is the book based? Is the method appropriate for your purposes?' p. 478);
- C. Language and Ideational Content ('Does the material give an unprejudiced and balanced picture of contemporary life in countries where the language is spoken?' 'Does it bring out contrasts between the foreign culture and the culture of your students?' p. 479);
- D. Linguistic coverage and organisation ('Is the *grammar* presented through structures?' p. 480);
- E. Types of activities ('Is provision made for *student-conducted activity*?' p. 482);
- F. Practical considerations ('Is the *price* reasonable for your school situation?' p. 482);

G. Enjoyment index ('Would you enjoy working with this book at this level?' p. 482).

As teachers worked their way through the checklist they chose from five possible evaluations for each category: 1) Excellent for my purposes; 2) Suitable; 3) Will do; 4) Not very suitable; 5) Useless for my purposes.

However, from the 1980s onwards, as English was increasingly marketed as a *lingua franca* and a key skill in an increasingly globalised world, cultural content of the kind implied by Rivers' category C began to change. What was known as *background studies*, namely a focus on the target national culture(s) associated with the target language, gradually disappeared. As Gray (2010a, 2012) has argued, English came to be associated almost exclusively in textbooks – particularly those produced in the UK and aimed at the global market - with wealthy cosmopolitan elites, linked to no particular nation state. In these textbooks the kind of culture most in evidence was that of conspicuous consumption and questions about cultural content in the *background studies* sense ceased to feature to a great extent.

In modern foreign languages the situation was somewhat different – at least in theory. Here, against the backdrop of an expanding European Union in which the free movement of labour and capital was being established, plurilingualism was promoted as a means of developing intercultural understanding. A Humboldtian argument in favour of the specifically educational value of foreign language learning was resurrected and endorsed by the Council of Europe in 1996. For scholars such as Byram, who was at the forefront of this move, foreign language learning was held to provide 'the opportunity for emancipation from the confines of learners' native habitat and culture, with the development of new perceptions and insights into foreign and native cultures alike' (Byram 1988: 15). From this perspective foreign language learning was re-constructed as foreign language-and-culture-learning and the classroom reconfigured as a privileged site for the development of what came to be known as intercultural competence (see also Kramsch 1993).

Key to this educational endeavour was the production of textbooks which would facilitate the development of this. Byram drew up a list of what he referred to as 'minimum content' to be addressed in the production of textbooks (see Fig. 1). The list was also suitable for use in the creation of questions to analyse existing textbooks (with the proviso that these would require customising by teachers for use in their own setting). For example, in the case of teachers of German to British students, Byram suggested, with regard to the first point on the minimum content list, that it would be important to check if the textbook included representations of *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) and asylum seekers as social groups found in modern Germany.

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• social identity and social groups
(ethnic minorities, social class, regional identity)• social interaction
(conventions of behaviour at differing levels of familiarity, as outsider and insider)• belief and behaviour |
|---|

<p>(taken-for-granted actions within a social group, moral and religious beliefs, daily routines)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social and political institutions <p>(state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • socialisation and the life-cycle <p>(families, schools, employment, rites of passage, divergent practices in different social groups, national auto-stereotypes of expectations)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national history <p>(historical and contemporary events which are significant in the constitution of the nation and its identity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national geography <p>(geographical factors seen as being significant, national boundaries and changes to them)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stereotypes and national identity <p>(notions of what is typical, origins of these notions, symbols of national stereotypes)</p>
--

Fig. 1 Byram's (1993) minimum cultural content for textbook production and textbook analysis

However, as we shall see in our own analysis in this chapter, and as Coffey (2013) and Ros i Solé (2013) have shown, the intercultural competence approach to modern foreign languages has proven to be less influential in textbook design than was initially hoped. At the same time as those concerned with the teaching of modern foreign languages were considering the role of textbooks in developing intercultural competence, other scholars in applied linguistics were turning their attention to language teaching materials as objects worthy of research. This was part of a broader 'retuning' of the field in the direction of greater interdisciplinarity and engagement with the social sciences - the case for which was made repeatedly throughout the 1990s by scholars such as Holliday (1996), who argued that researchers needed to develop a 'sociological imagination' (cf. Mills 1959). Two ground-breaking studies by Dendrinos (1992) and Littlejohn (1992) set the tone for much of what was to follow. Both studies were unique in that their point of departure was not the assumption that certain content *should* be present (as in the abovementioned checklists), but instead they sought to identify what content *was* present. This change of emphasis was representative of a shift from a view of textbooks as *curriculum artefacts* (in which concern relating to matters of syllabus and methodology were central) to one in which they were considered primarily as *cultural artefacts* (with a focus on their role in reproducing dominant ideologies and normativities, as well as issues related to the conditions of their production, circulation and consumption). This shift also served to bring textbook analysis in applied linguistics into line with textbook analysis in the field of education more generally, where there was an established tradition of research into textbook content (e.g. Anyon, 1979; Apple, 1985). Indeed, as the *UNESCO guidebook on textbook research and textbook revision*

(Pingel, 2009) shows, it is a tradition that stretches back to the first decades of the twentieth century.

Today textbook analysis in the area of second and foreign language teaching and learning is an activity typified by a wide range of disciplinary and philosophical influences, in which issues relating to representation, identity, erasure, ideology, discourse and politics are central (e.g. Azimova and Johnson 2012; Gray 2010a; Gray and Block 2014; Harwood 2010, 2014; Kullman 2013; Littlejohn 2012). In general most of this research is undertaken in the qualitative content analysis tradition (Harwood 2010), and this is the approach we adopt in this chapter. Qualitative content analysis is a hermeneutical approach which seeks to uncover the meanings and values associated with the language being taught, and endeavours to account for these from a particular theoretical perspective – in our own case a neo-Marxist one embedded in a broader political economy framework. In the next section we discuss this political economy framework and how it leads us to a particular set of concepts which undergird our approach to French language teaching materials.

Key concepts

Space does not allow us to provide a thorough discussion of the key concepts undergirding this paper - political economy, neoliberalism and branding - and so abbreviated treatments will have to suffice. We understand political economy to be an area of enquiry with roots in the classic economic theory of Smith (2012 [1776]), Ricardo (2004 [1817]) and Mill (2004 [1848/65]) and the subsequent critique of this theory elaborated by Marx (1990 [1867]). It is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on and analyses the complex relationship between the individual and society, the market and the state, and intersection of the political, the social, the cultural and the geographical with economics. In recent times, there has been something of a split between political economy scholarship which comes directly from economics and that which comes from political science, sociology, cultural studies, media studies and geography, with the common element being a focus on the workings of contemporary capitalism, also known as ‘neoliberalism’.

Neoliberalism may be understood as the version of global capitalism that has become dominant over the past four decades, remaining relatively intact in the midst of the global depression which began in 2007. As explained in a long list of critical monographs which have appeared over the past 15 years - Harvey (2003) is an early oft-cited early text, while Springer (2016) is a more recent one - neoliberalism entails a range of material and discursive phenomena. As we note elsewhere, on the material side, we find:

the incessant reduction of the welfare state through cuts to public services; the concomitant privatization of many of those public services which the state no longer funds; the imposition of regressive tax regimes which favour the rich while penalising the less well off; and the deregulation of the financial markets, leading to a ‘footloose’ or ‘casino’ capitalism in which practitioners know no territorial limits, nor show any responsibility to national states, communities or individuals. (Block and Gray 2016: 482)

Meanwhile, on the discursive side, we see the rise of ‘the market’ as the master metaphor for shaping discursive constructions of many areas of day-to-day activity. This market metaphor has taken over (or colonised) understandings of domains of

activity which hitherto had been outside its remit. Education is an oft-cited example in recent years (e.g. Giroux 2008), as competition and the drive towards ever greater efficiency take over for the basic notions of functionality and public service provision for all.

Beyond the material and the discursive, there is also the view of neoliberalism as a 'rationality' (Dardot and Laval 2013), that is, as an alignment of beliefs and activities of both the ruling and the ruled. Viewing neoliberalism in this way allows us to examine how it has had a profound impact on individual and collective subjectivities. As Brown suggests, 'neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life' and 'figures [them] ... as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care"—the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions' (Brown 2005: 43). Brown bases her views on Lemke's (2001) early discussion of Foucault's renowned lectures on 'biopolitics' at the Collège de France in 1978-79. In them, Foucault argued that the field of economics had evolved over the 20th century, to the point that it was no longer about 'the analysis of the historical logic of processes' - rather it had shifted to a concern with 'the analysis of the internal rationality, the strategic programming of individual activity' (Foucault 2008: 223). A major pillar of this turn to 'the strategic programming of individual activity' was Becker's (1964) human capital theory, which was based on the fundamental idea that 'individuals decide on their education, training, medical care, [...] by weighing the benefits and costs' (Becker 1993: 43). Individuals are, in other words, free calculating agents who are out to better themselves by making themselves more saleable in the job market, achieving this increased saleability via the acquisition of what Bourdieu (1984) was to call economic, social and cultural capital. This view of human beings aligns with Beck's later observation that we are living in an age in which 'each person's biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on [individual] decisions' (Beck 1992: 135), as well as views typically found in the world of business today, where notions such as 'brand you' have become prevalent (Peters 2008). As Gray (2012: 95) notes, the only way to survive in the 'new world economic order' is for individuals to brand themselves in such a way that they command attention in the marketplace.

As for what Peters means by branding, we might consult a recent publication by Slade-Brooking (2016), in which the author outlines the basic tenets of brand creation and maintenance for products, providing a clear and simple explanation of what branding is about:

In its simplest form, the practice of branding is about creating differentiation, making one product or service seem different from competitive products. Brand values are the core beliefs of philosophies that a brand upholds, and which differentiate it from its competitors (Slade-Brooking 2016: 14)

Slade-Brooking goes on to cite Aaker's (1997) earlier work on 'dimensions of brand personality', where the latter term is defined as 'the set of human characteristics associated with a brand' (Aaker 1997: 347). Here Aaker refers to the framing of consumer products in terms of human characteristics. However, since our concern here is with the rise of self-care, individualisation and self-branding, that is the grooming of human beings to make them more competitive in the neoliberal age, Aaker's 'dimensions of brand personality' model may be suitably applied. Thus we may think of

individuals as brands in terms of how well they convey the following five clusters of positive human characteristics:

1. Sincerity (down-to earth, family-oriented, small town, honest, sincere, real, wholesome, cheerful, sentimental, friendly)
2. Excitement (daring, trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, young, imaginative, unique, up-to-date, independent, contemporary)
3. Competence (reliable, hard-working, secure, intelligent, technical, corporate, successful, leader, confident)
4. Sophistication (upper-class, glamorous, good-looking, charming, feminine, smooth)
5. Ruggedness (outdoorsy, masculine, Western, tough, rugged)

(Aaker 1997: 354)

Slade-Brookings expresses doubts about any one consumer product being framed successfully in terms of all five dimensions, but in a world of make-overs and constant self-care, it is not difficult to find examples of individuals who, in different facets of their lives, come to embody characteristics in all five categories. A good example of this kind of all-things-to-all-people self-branding is retired footballer David Beckham, who in his lifetime has embodied, at different times and often simultaneously, characteristics in all five of Aaker's categories. Thus, in the early part of his career, in the early to mid-1990s, he was generally seen according to Aaker's 'sincerity' category, as 'down-to-earth' and 'wholesome' (and indeed, simple). However, by the turn of the century, he had forged an image as a 'metrosexual', 'new man', embodying all of the characteristics in Aaker's 'excitement' category –from 'daring' to 'contemporary'. Since becoming a father, Beckham has also been seen as a family man, which leads back to his 'sincere' image, in particular as 'family-oriented'. And, in recent years he has become a businessman, the embodiment of 'competence' characteristics, such as 'reliable', 'hard-working', 'successful' and 'confident'. His aforementioned metrosexuality, combined with his tendency to be portrayed as an attractive sex symbol, mean that he has often been positioned according to Aaker's 'sophistication' category, as 'glamorous', 'charming' and 'smooth'. Finally, as a professional footballer, he was, almost by necessity, associated with a series of 'ruggedness' characteristics, including 'outdoorsy', 'masculine' and 'tough'.

Methodology

The discussion in the previous section allows us to propose a methodology for analysing L2 textbooks – and here, specifically French L2 textbooks – in terms of how they construct idealised L2 users. We are concerned with how users are positioned as neoliberal citizens who, if not overtly entrepreneurial, are still highly individualistic 'brand-me' embodiments of the Aaker's (1997) dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. As for the actual procedure we follow, we employ qualitative content analysis which consists of reading materials carefully to see to what extent and how citizenship and class positions are portrayed. We are interested in the 'representational repertoires' as 'the stock of ideas, images and ways of talking which are ... deployed in the creation of a set of meanings' (Gray 2010: 42).

The two books examined are Brilliant, Bazou, Racine and Schenker's second edition of *Édito, Niveau B2*, published in 2010, and the third edition of the same book, published in 2015, and written by Heu and Mabilat. Both books are directed at adults and late adolescents, and as the title suggests, both provide practice at CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) level B2, which is an intermediate level. In choosing these two books, we have been motivated by the fact that *Édito, Niveau B2* is a book series which is currently used for the teaching of French across Europe. We also find it interesting to examine differences between the two books, the first written at the end of the 2000s, when the current worldwide depression was beginning, and the second written once this depression had profoundly altered many economic, political and social relations in France and Europe at large.

In the section that follows we take the reader through a critical discussion of sections in the books which we think allow us to address the central issues discussed previously. All direct citations from the books have been translated from French into English by Block.

Neoliberalism and branding in the French textbook *Édito, Niveau B2*

Before moving to the key instances to be discussed, it is worthwhile to comment on the overall content of these books. Gray's (2010a, 2010b, 2012) analysis of English language textbooks showed that by the 1990s they had become overtly socially liberal, exhibiting gender equality, showing a sensitivity to racial and ethnic diversity and adopting a more international focus. They had also begun to include activities, if not entire units, on key social issues of our times, such as environmentalism, animal rights, education, new technologies, immigration and culture and the media. And with each new edition, there has been an increasing number of activities and units devoted to a range of self-care issues, organised around topics such as holidays and travel, food and cuisine, shopping and fashion, and physical and psychological health and wellbeing. Finally, all books have units on work and the workplace, with the inevitable inclusion of activities about how to write a CV and how to do a job interview.

The two editions of *Édito, Niveau B2* focused on here contain all of these elements. Above all, the 2015 edition includes more photographs and oral and written texts are enlivened by the introduction of 'real people' who are either living in France temporarily or are the children of immigrants. These individuals come from a range of countries, including Italy, Brazil, Chile, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, and their presence has the overall effect of making the 2015 edition seem more inclusive and international than the 2010 edition. This liberal stance regarding the content of both books can be seen in texts and activities on gender and racial discrimination in the workplace, a section on adultery in the 2010 edition, and a section on same-sex marriage in the 2015 edition. Finally, in line with the above-cited notion of foreign language learning as foreign language-and-culture-learning, the two editions of the textbook remain grounded in France as nation-state and French history, society and culture (as opposed to a global society and culture), including references to former colonies and present-day *départaments*.

What then can we say about how the two editions position students as neoliberal citizens, that is, entrepreneurial, individualistic 'brand-me' embodiments of Aaker's dimensions of brand personality? In the 2010 edition, there is a unit entitled *Ressources Humaines* in which learners are taken through a series of exercises related to the world

of work. Early in the unit (Brillant *et al* 2010: 136-137), there is a reading comprehension exercise based on an article about French nationals who have gone to work in Québec, entitled 'Understanding French employees in 6 lessons'. In this article, we learn that French employees: (1) do not smile; (2) never appear to be busy, often taking long lunches, even if they do do their work; (3) are not likely to contradict their superiors; (4) are masters of argumentation; (5) are disinclined to admit that they do not know something; and (6) value ideas over self-presentation. If one is to judge by so much that is written about how employees should behave in the current era, this text appears to position French workers as 'bad', or in any case, not in line with neoliberal rationalities. Among other things, they are presented as paradigmatically inflexible and uninterested in developing their 'brand-me'.

However, if we apply Aaker's categories to the text, a more mixed picture emerges. First, while French workers lack a great deal of Aaker's 'sincerity' and 'excitement' (on the one hand, they are not 'wholesome', 'cheerful', 'sentimental', or 'friendly'; on the other hand, they are not 'daring', 'trendy', 'exciting' or 'imaginative'), they equally embody some of the characteristics that fall under these categories, in that they are 'honest' and 'sincere' in their no-nonsense approach, and they are 'unique' and 'independent' in the context of Québec. In addition, French workers could be seen to embody much that falls under the category 'competence', in that they are, despite appearances, 'hard-working', 'intelligent', 'technical', 'corporate', and 'confident'. As for 'sophistication', they perhaps, by default (being French in Québec), exude an element of 'glamour', 'charm' and 'smoothness'. Finally, the category 'ruggedness' seems of little relevance here, unless we mean it more abstractly to position French worker as mavericks in the *Québécois* context, or to capture that they have shown 'toughness' in moving far away from their home context. In short, while the presentation of French employees here is not orthodoxly in line with idealisation of the neoliberal citizen, the insistence on the efficiency, preparedness and argumentation skills of these workers – in effect, their ability to get things done- overrides their portrayal as 'very French' with regard to their interpersonal skills.

Elsewhere, in the same unit (Brillant *et al* 2010: 147) there is a short questionnaire '*Quell(le) travailleur(-euse) êtes-vous?*' ('Which worker are you?'), consisting of just seven questions. The questions are about the degree of commitment one has to one's job and the amount of flexibility and initiative one shows, either as a productive worker or as a defender of one's own rights and interests, in short as independent-minded. For example, one question asks what one does if it is five pm on a Friday and there is still a job to finish. One answer is to stay to finish the job and even come into the office on Saturday or Sunday if necessary. A second answer is to agree to stay but only if it means getting time off in the future as compensation. A third answer is to decline in order to go to a family member's birthday party. Another question is about what an employee does upon being summoned for a meeting with the boss. One answer is that the employee spends a weekend preparing for the meeting. A second answer is that the employee sees the meeting as a formality, but is still a little nervous about it. A third answer is that the employee assumes that the meeting means a pay rise and the response is to put champagne in the fridge. These questions lead to the respondents being put in one of the three following categories (where first answers correspond to the first category, second answers to the second and third answers to the third):

- A model worker, even zealous, loved by bosses. But be careful not to be swallowed alive by your job.
- A ‘lambda’ worker, serious without sacrificing your life for your job. Watch out for the threat of boredom.
- An amateur worker. Are you really comfortable in the world of work? Deep down, perhaps you are right.

(Brillant *et al*, 2010: 147; NB slightly reworded)

If we apply Aaker’s model to the self-presentation that emerges from individual responses to the questions in this activity, we see that it is really only the ‘competence’ category that is relevant. Indeed, as we move from worker type 1 to type 2 to type 3, we see a decrease in competence as the valences for characteristics such as ‘reliable’, ‘hard-working’, ‘technical’ and ‘corporate’ seemingly descend. Indeed, the contrast between the model worker and the amateur worker is considerable: being industrious and loved by bosses versus not knowing how the world of work functions. The middle ground seems more sensible, perhaps, but it is perhaps too unambitious. At the same time, the warnings about being consumed by work and being bored, for types 1 and 2, and the acknowledgment that perhaps being a type 3 amateur is the best route after all, come across as something of a challenge to the neoliberal citizen, as outlined above. In this sense, type 1 may be an ideal, but it may have negative consequences, even if these are not specified (we are not told why it is bad to be consumed by one’s work).

The 2010 edition of *Édito* was being prepared when the current worldwide depression began to deepen in France in the late 2000s. Perhaps for this reason, there is just one reference to this depression in the form of text on how to afford travel despite ‘the crisis’ (Brillant *et al* 2010: 72). In this text, readers are advised to save money by shopping for reduced-price last-minute reservations, flying with low cost airlines and holidaying in France. By contrast, in the 2015 edition, prepared as the depression deepened, there are references to the effects of economic crisis such as emigration in search of better job opportunities. In a unit entitled *Au boulot!* (At work!), there is a listening activity on this topic (Heu and Mabilet 2015: 137, 206) which begins with a journalist stating that ‘more than a quarter of university graduates are ready to go abroad’ (Heu and Mabilet 2015: 206). There is then an interview with an emigré who makes several interesting observations. First, he makes clear that those who leave France are not necessarily desperate and that CV building may be the prime motivation. Second, he notes how today it is easy for young Europeans to travel throughout the EU without legal restrictions. And third, he makes a brief comment about immigration into France, but curiously only mentions jobs available to the ‘English in Paris’ and speakers of ‘literary’ Arabic, Hebrew and Russian in the north of France. This last observation is curious to say the least, as it mentions very precise language-related employment and seemingly ignores the vast number of low-level service jobs taken by immigrants coming from countries around the world. But more interesting here is the way that the speaker positions himself as the paradigmatic young European: well educated, with initiative and unafraid of leaving France for another country.

Also in same unit, we are introduced to Éric Carreel, a ‘serial entrepreneur in the high tech sector in France’ (Heu and Mabilet 2015: 136) and founder of several start-ups, who explains why he has stayed in France despite the crisis. Carreel begins by extolling the virtues of doing business in France to explain why he has not moved to the United States: France is what he knows best, there are a lot of qualified people and it is easy to

launch a start-up. However, he believes that the Silicon Valley model of open plan offices and colleagues exchanging ideas over coffee has not taken root in France, although he seems to think that this a matter of time: As he explains ‘things move fast, we are developing an ecosystem favourable to the creation of companies, mentalities evolve’ (Heu and Mabilet 2015: 136). Carreel goes on to explain what such developments mean:

The caricaturised discourses about bosses, they’re over. There is a benevolence, the French know that the economy is life, that nothing is fixed, that companies have to die and others be born. There is a new dynamism. Many young people are also beginning to understand that entering the venerable big business is no longer synonymous with eternal salvation. This is the advantage of the crisis, it pushes us to dare to do things that we refused to do in the past. I am optimistic about business creation in France. (Heu and Mabilet, 2015: 137).

In this statement, many of the elements of the neoliberal citizen come together. First, in terms of self-branding and Aaker’s categories, we see how Carreel essentially defines the brand of worker he would employ. And although he does not actually use Aaker’s terms, we can easily imagine that the young employee he values will manifest characteristics associated with ‘excitement’ (from ‘daring’ to ‘contemporary’) and ‘competence’ (from ‘reliable’ to ‘confident’). In Carreel’s words, we see a rejection of the old – bosses and hierarchies, as well as companies and jobs for life. There is an embrace of the postmodern notion that ‘nothing is fixed’ and that, in essence, everything is up for grabs and there for the taking, if one has the preparation, initiative and drive necessary. Younger people are framed as the future, as they are the ones ‘beginning to understand’ new developments. Finally, there is the notion of crisis as opportunity (Mirowski 2013) and self-acknowledged optimism about the future of business in France. All in all, this is virtual paean to neoliberalism and the kinds of people necessary to make it work. Notably, there is no mention of specific state of the French economy at the time of the interview in early 2014. And there is no mention of the job losses which come with increasingly frequent waves of technological innovation. The smaller pie is apparently not a problem for those who can compete successfully. In this sense, Carreel’s world of industrious young people is a world dominated by young people who embody extremely middle class (and indeed, upper-class) characteristics (Block 2014). And, we might add, it is a world that one finds in English language textbooks (Gray and Block 2014), German language textbooks (Block, 2016), Catalan language textbooks (Bori in preparation) and, we suspect, just about all modern foreign language textbooks today.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analysed selected sections from two recent editions of a French textbook, noting how discourse around self-care and self-branding, which we see as integral parts of the broader framework of the neoliberal citizen, are key elements in the books’ content. We have situated our analysis against the backdrop of the global depression which began in 2007, and which at the time of writing continues. And as we stated at the outset, we believe that it is important to carry out this type of inquiry in order to make the point that language teaching materials are ideologically-loaded and embedded in the political economy of day-to-day life.

In a previous publication (Gray and Block 2014), we suggested that English language teachers who are not aligned with the neoliberal agenda, might seek out published materials which engage with political economy issues in an explicit manner. We cited Auerbach and Wallerstein (2004), a book aimed at North American immigrants, as an alternative to the neoliberalism-friendly textbooks which are all-pervasive in the global English language teaching market. In this book, students are exposed to case histories of real workers and texts about contemporary politics and economics. They are also provided with legal advice and general information about how to deal with exploitative employers. However, the Auerbach and Wallerstein material is designed specifically for new arrivals to North America and therefore is not directed at a global audience, as is the case with *Édito, Niveau B2*.

There are, no doubt, French teaching materials which similarly address the needs of immigrants in France. But more importantly, there are many French teachers around the world who are not in agreement with, or complicit with, neoliberal rationalities, discourses and policies. We assume that when some of these teachers include in their lessons texts and activities such as the ones cited and analysed above, they insert a critical element which goes beyond what is provided on the page, subverting, as it were, the ideology implicit in the ways that texts and activities are presented. To do otherwise – that is, to stick to the provided script – is, in effect, to reproduce, and even strengthen further the ‘neoliberal rationalities’ (Dardot and Laval 2013), which by now are so pervasive as to constitute a kind of common sense about how the world works and how individuals and collectives behave and make meaning within its parameters.

References

- Aaker, J. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34, 3, 347-356.
- Anyon, J. (1979). Ideology and United States history textbooks. *Harvard Educational Review*, 49, 3, 361-386.
- Apple, M. (1985). The culture and commerce of the textbook. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 17, 2, 147-62.
- Auerbach, E. and Wallerstein, N. (2004). *Problem-posing at work: English for action*. Edmonton: Grass Roots Press.
- Azimova, N. and Johnson, B. (2012). Invisibility and ownership of language: Problems of representation in Russian language textbooks. *The Modern Language Journal*, 96, 3, 337-49.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Becker, G. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Becker, G. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*, 3rd edition. Chicago: Chicago University Press
- Block, D. (2010). Globalisation and language teaching. In N. Coupland (ed.) *Handbook of language and globalisation* (pp. 287-304). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Block, D. (2014). *Social class in applied linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Block, D. (2016). Political economy for language teaching, Plenary given at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences 2016, Calgary, Canada, 31 May 2016.
- Block, D. and Gray, J. (2016). ‘Just go away and do it and you get marks’: The degradation of language teaching in neoliberal times. *Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 36, 1, 481–494.

- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction*. London: Routledge.
- Bori, P. (in preparation). *Language textbooks in the era of neoliberalism*. London: Routledge.
- Brillant, C., Bazou, V., Racine, R. and Schenker, J.-C. (2010). *Édito, Niveau B2*, 2e édition. Paris: Didier.
- Brown, W. (2005). *Edgework: Critical essays on knowledge and politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Byram, M. (1988). Foreign language education and cultural studies. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 1, 1, 15-31.
- Byram, M. (ed.) (1993). *Germany/its representation in textbooks for teaching German in Great Britain*. Frankfurt: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg.
- Coffey, S. (2013). Communicating constructions of Frenchness through Language coursebooks: A comparison, in J. Gray (ed.) *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials* (pp. 137-160). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Crouch, C. (2011). *The strange non-death of neoliberalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cuningsworth, A. (1984). *Evaluating and selecting EFL materials*. London: Heinemann.
- Dardot P. and Laval, C. (2013) *The new way of the world: On a neoliberal society*. London: Verso.
- Dendrinos, B. (1992). *The EFL textbook and ideology*. Athens: N. C. Grivas Publications.
- Duménil, G. and Lévy, D. (2011). *The crisis of neoliberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The Birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Giroux, H. (2008). *Against the terror of neoliberalism: Politics beyond the age of greed*. London: Paradigm.
- Gray, J. (2010a). *The construction of English: Culture, consumerism and promotion in the global ELT coursebook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gray, J. (2010b). The branding of English and the culture of the new capitalism: Representations of the world of work in English language textbooks. *Applied Linguistics* 31, 5, 714-733.
- Gray, J. (2012). Neoliberalism, celebrity and ‘aspirational content’ in English language teaching textbooks for a global market. In D. Block, J. Gray and M. Holborow, *Neoliberalism and applied linguistics* (pp. 86–113). London: Routledge,.
- Gray, J. and Block, D. (2014). All middle class now? Evolving representations of the working class in the neoliberal era – the case of ELT textbooks, in N. Harwood (ed.) *English language teaching textbooks: Content, consumption, production* (pp. 45-71). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harvey, D. (2003). *A Brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harwood, N. (ed.) (2014). *English language teaching textbooks: Content, consumption, production*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harwood, N. (ed.) (2010) *English language teaching materials: Theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heu, E. and Mabilet, J.J. (2015). *Édito, Niveau B2*, 3e édition. Paris: Didier.
- Holliday, A. (1996). Developing a sociological imagination: Expanding ethnography in international English language education. *Applied Linguistics*, 17, 2, 234-255.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Kullman, J. (2013). Telling tales: Changing discourses of identity in the 'global' UK-published English language coursebook, in J. Gray (ed.) *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials* (pp.17-39). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lemke, T. (2001). 'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy and Society*, 30, 2, 190–207.
- Littlejohn, A. (2012). Language teaching materials and the (very) big picture'. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*. 9, 1, 283-297.
- Littlejohn, A. (1992). *Why are ELT materials the way they are?*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Lancaster University.
- Marx, K. (1990 [1867]). *Capital: A critique of political economy, Volume 1*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Mill, J. S. (2004[1848/65]). *Principles of political economy*. London: Prometheus Books.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mirowski, P. (2013). *Never let a serious crisis go to waste: How neoliberalism survived the economic meltdown*. London: Verso.
- Peters, T. (2008). *The brand you 50: Fifty ways to transform yourself from an "employee" into a brand that shouts distinction, commitment, and passion!*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Pingel, F. (2009). *UNESCO guidebook on textbook research and textbook revision* (2nd edition). Paris/Braunschweig: UNESCO.
- Ricardo, D. (2004 [1817]). *The principles of political economy and taxation*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications.
- Rivers, W. (1968). *Teaching foreign language skills*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Ros i Solé, C. (2013). Spanish imagined: Political and subjective approaches to language textbooks, in J. Gray (ed.) *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials* (pp.161-181). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sheldon, L. E. (1988). Evaluating ELT textbooks and materials. *ELT Journal*, 42 , 4, 237-246.
- Slade-Brooking, C. (2016). *Brand identity: A guide for beginners*. London: Laurence King Publishing.
- Smith, A. (2012 [1776]). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Classics.
- Springer, S. (2016). *The discourse of neoliberalism*. New York: Rowan and Littlefield.