WOMEN AT WORK: STEREOTYPES IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH FOR BUSINESS COURSEBOOKS

Cet article examine les stéréotypes récurrents dans les manuels d'anglais et de français des affaires concernant la manière dont les femmes sont représentées au travail. A partir d'une analyse linguistique des textes supports qui constituent les manuels, des images et des représentations récurrentes des expériences professionnelles, des rôles et du statut des personnages féminins sont identifiées. La représentation des sphères publique et privée, ainsi que de la frontière entre elles, est également une source de stéréotypes relatifs aux différences entre les femmes et les hommes. Menée dans un cadre comparatif, l'analyse révèle que l'activité professionnelle des femmes est présentée de manière similaire dans les manuels des deux langues. Cet article montre, par ailleurs, que même si des progrès ont été réalisés sur le plan socioculturel quant à la visibilité des femmes, la façon dont les femmes sont représentées dans les supports pédagogiques peut encore être améliorée.

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Introduction

Since the end of the 1970s, the representation of women in language coursebooks has been an area of particular interest in second and foreign language education. Early studies were often focused on issues such as omission and exclusion (Hartman & Judd, 1978), the allocation of professional roles and corresponding status (Hellinger, 1980), or what Porreca (1984) calls "male-firstness", the initial position of a masculine subject in a coordinated pair (i.e. *man and woman, boys and girls*). In these early studies, a quantitative analysis of the number of female and male characters could be combined with an analysis of the types of jobs presented to arrive at conclusions regarding the level of visibility of female characters, as well as their corresponding roles and social status. Since the 1990s, interventions, such as "gender-inclusive language reform" (Winter & Pauwels, 2006) and the formalization at the social level of norms linked to non-sexist language, have had a concrete impact on the development of educational materials. Although the use of gendered language seems to have been minimized or eliminated from English coursebooks, more recent studies (notably Lee, 2018) indicate that gender stereotypes persist.

Even if progress has been made and the visibility of women is no longer the central issue, it is necessary to consider how gender-linked stereotypes continue to be embedded in language coursebooks. This article will provide some insight on this question by presenting the persistent stereotypes identified in current English and French for business language coursebooks and will show how these stereotypes become encoded in the texts. While the studies previously cited focused mainly on English language coursebooks, the points that will be discussed in this article are part of a larger comparative study of English and French for business coursebooks that sought to identify how women are represented (Anderson, 2019). This contribution is situated within a larger movement in the field of textbook

studies oriented towards a cross-cultural approach that takes into consideration diverse linguistic contexts, as well as the analysis of textbooks and coursebooks in languages other than English (see notably Fuchs & Bock, 2018).

A Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis of Business Language Coursebooks

This analysis falls more broadly within the theoretical and methodological framework of Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis (CCDA) (von Münchow, 2004, 2018), a discipline developed at the intersection of text linguistics and discourse analysis in the French tradition. In this discipline, the contrastive approach is dependent upon the existence of texts, documents or other semiotic content of the same discursive genre produced in different linguistic communities. An initial identification of linguistic, textual or pragmatic features in the texts allows the analyst to observe how objects, social actors, themes or other phenomena are represented, rendered visible, evaluated, or conversely, relegated to the background or erased entirely. Comparisons can then be made between the texts originating from different linguistic communities to observe how the textual genre is realized, as well as observe how different images or representations emerge and can be connected to larger social, historical or cultural contexts.

From six coursebooks of each language[1], published between the years 2001 and 2016, and designed for language learners at the intermediate level, a corpus of texts (dialogues, first-person accounts, grammar and vocabulary exercises, letters, résumés, job postings) was gathered. The analysis that followed focused on the description of recurring linguistic markers, grammatical structures and lexical items within the texts. After this initial descriptive phase, a second interpretative phase led to the identification of recurrent images of the roles, responsibilities and professional experiences of women and men as they are represented throughout the pages of the coursebooks. In the following section, the results of this contrastive analysis will be presented, focusing on the common points between the coursebooks of both languages to highlight the recurrent representations and stereotypes. In English and in French

similar linguistic markers and discursive operations were identified throughout the analysis of the texts which ultimately leads to the embedding of similar stereotypes in the coursebooks.

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Representing action, reflection and hierarchies

The first area where a persistent and underlying stereotype was observed pertains to the way that female characters present their jobs and their past professional experiences. An important point of entry into the analysis of the texts was the verb and the resulting syntactic structure of the sentence. When speaking about previous work experience, it is possible to do so by describing the concrete actions that formed the basis of the job, using verbs that represent the grammatical subject as actor and agent. It is also possible to present one's previous work experience through the feelings or thoughts associated with the job, or additionally, mentioning what was learned by doing the job. The action denoted by the verb is consequently situated at the emotional or cognitive level and represents the grammatical subject as a reflective and introspective being, removed from the action.

To illustrate this point, examples (1) and (2) are extracts of two dialogues from the same coursebook and found in the same unit addressing the topic of recruitment. Each character, Nicolas in (1) and Nathalie in (2), discusses their job search with an expert. The male character is represented as actor and agent of the concrete actions encoded by verbs such as *travailler*, *vendre*, *augmenter* and *conseiller*, while the female character presents her past work experiences through the emotions felt (*aimer*) and the learning that occurred (*apprendre*).

1 See in the bibliography Bloomfield & Tauzin (2001), Cherifi *et al.*, (2009), Cotton *et al.* (2010), Dubois & Tauzin (2016), Grant & Mclarty (2006), Hughes & Naunton (2014), Koester *et al.*, (2012), Mitchell & Fleuranceau (2011), Penfornis (2011), Rosillo *et al.*, (2013), Trappe & Tullis (2005), Whitby (2013).

(1)

FLORENCE BROCHARD – Alors, je vois sur votre CV que vous avez fini vos études de finances en 2001 et que vous avez immédiatement été engagé par Alt Bank.

NICOLAS CAGNON – Oui, c'est bien ça. J'y ai travaillé pendant trois ans au total. J'ai d'abord vendu des assurances-vie et j'ai augmenté les ventes de 5% !

FLORENCE BROCHARD – Hmm. Très bien !

NICOLAS CAGNON – Puis, j'ai demandé ma mutation au service épargne-retraite. J'ai conseillé les clients sur les meilleurs plans d'épargne jusqu'en août 2004.

[…]

(Cherifi *et al.*, 2009: 15)

(2)

BERTRAND – Comment se passe votre recherche d'emploi ?

NATHALIE – A vrai dire, pas très bien…

BERTRAND – Où avez-vous travaillé auparavant ?

NATHALIE – En 2003, j'ai occupé mon premier poste chez Tarty. J'ai été embauchée immédiatement après mes études. A cette époque-là, j'aimais beaucoup mon activité car mes tâches étaient variées. Un an après, j'ai eu l'opportunité de travailler dans différents services pour élargir mes compétences. J'ai commencé comme vendeuse au service électroménager et j'ai fini à la gestion des stocks. Pendant trois ans, j'ai beaucoup appris. Puis, j'ai demandé ma mutation en province et, là, ça ne s'est vraiment pas bien passé. Je suis au chômage depuis quatre mois.

[…]

(Cherifi *et al.*, 2009: 9)

Throughout the analysis of the texts of both languages, the professional experiences of female and male characters were found to be represented differently. The male characters were often represented as the grammatical subject of verbs that denote a tangible action or process, while the female characters were often represented as reflective and introspective beings which served to further represent them as outside observers, situated on the sidelines of their own professional experiences. This form of positioning relative to their professional experiences also denotes a certain level of passivity from a grammatical and semantic standpoint but also ideologically, given the age-old stereotype that sees women as emotional and introspective beings while men are seen as active beings.

Talking about one's work inevitably allows the speaker to affirm their professional identity and their place in the hierarchies that characterize the business world. The verbs *to be* or *to have*, as they allow for the affirmation of professional identities and the declaration of one's responsibilities, also contribute to differentiating the professional experiences represented in the coursebooks. In example (3), a vocabulary review exercise where the learner matches the sentence to the corresponding job title, the majority of the sentences present the concrete actions related to a particular job. The exception is sentence 3 ("I am the senior executive") which matches with the job title of "chief executive officer". This type of structure is what Hyland & Tse (2012) qualify as an "identity claim", an affirmation of a unique and specific identity which is more or less permanent. Even if the identities of the subjects of the other sentences are undetermined, the possessive determiner "his" in sentence 6 provides a clear indication that the chief executive officer is a male character. In sentence 6, the job of the personal assistant is presented via the relationship to the chief executive officer and the tasks and objects that are associated with "his" work.

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(3)

 chief executive officer
 personal assistant
 sales representative
 training manager
 purchasing manager
 laboratory technician
 quality control manager

1. I **organize** training courses for all employees – languages, computers, etc.
2. I **set up** the equipment and do experiments and tests.
3. I **am** the senior executive.
4. I **check** that products are made to the right standards.
5. I **visit** customers and try to increase business.
6. I **work** with the chief executive officer. I **am responsible** for his date-book, **organize** his travel, and **take** calls for him.
7. I **buy** everything the company needs, from raw materials to stationery.
(Grant & Mclarty, 2006: 50)

In the hierarchy implied through these sentences, the person with the highest level of responsibility and occupying the highest position is a male character. According to the American sociologist Joan Acker (1990, 2006), who studied the connections between class, race and gender in the context of the business world, a job title confers upon its holder a role and a position in a hierarchy. The level of responsibility and the complexity of the tasks associated with the job are also reflected by the position within the hierarchy. Hierarchies, though, are ultimately reflective of larger social and economic processes and, as such, provide a mirror on long standing social realities. The hierarchies that are represented in the coursebooks often present the female characters in the lowest positions, with the least complex tasks. Their tasks and responsibilities are also often represented in relation to their superior. In example (4), an exercise that requires the learner to identify the job title of each character from a corresponding organizational chart, the job of Sophie Nguyen is presented not through what she does but through her relationship to her supervisor. When each character is placed in the organizational chart, Sophie Nguyen occupies the lowest position.

> # The hierarchies that are represented in the coursebooks often present the female characters in the lowest positions, with the least complex tasks.

(4)

Yves Bérard dirige le laboratoire et les achats. C'est le directeur technique.
a. Xavier Simon **dirige** l'entreprise.
b. Sophie Nguyen **travaille sous la direction du** responsable marketing.
c. Marc Delfino **dirige** trois services.
d. Lisa Henry **gère** la comptabilité.
e. Ethan Widal **participe** au développement de l'entreprise.
f. Louis Caron **dirige** le service
(Rosillo *et al*., 2013: 42)

The coursebooks of both languages consistently display what could be described as "status hierarchies related to gender" (McHugh & Hambaugh, 2010), which have the effect of placing women in an inferior position. Discursive operations like *functionalization* (which will be presented below), further contribute to the reinforcement of this stereotype that sees women's work as less complex and less qualified and, as a result, the work done by women is perceived as being less valuable.

Functionalization and the representation of women's work as a temporary activity

Throughout the texts of both languages, the structure *to work as/travailler comme* is often used by female characters to present their job. When contrasted with the identity claim seen previously in (3) constructed around the verb *to be* ("I am the senior executive"), *to work as* is often indicative of a professional activity that is transitional in nature, possibly done while waiting for another opportunity. The verb *to be* allows for the affirmation of one's professional identity, while *to work as* allows the speaker to describe what they do while avoiding any affirmation of a permanent connection to a profession. In the coursebooks, the jobs of secretaries, administrative assistants or personal assistants are often presented in this way, as illustrated in example (5).

(5)

    a. Personnel
    b. Accounts
    c. Technical support
    d. Quality control
    e. Sales
    f. Marketing
    g. Research and development
    h. Production

1. Mr Mitchell is a marketing executive who has received several complaints from customers about faulty goods.
2. Mr Davies is a consultant who thinks he has not been paid for an invoice.
3. Mr Ivanov has just received the results of some laboratory tests on a possible new product.
4. Ms Santoro is a sales executive who is interested in working for the company.
5. Ms Evans works in the company as a secretary and she has a problem with her computer.
6. Mr Chen is a retailer who is interested in stocking the company's products.
(Whitby, 2013: 11)

Female characters will most frequently refer to their children or to their husbands, and as a result, different dimensions of their identities (as a mother, as a wife) become evident.

In (5), the other characters in the exercise are represented by their roles of *marketing executive*, *consultant*, *sales executive* and *retailer*, a discursive operation called functionalization (van Leeuwen, 2008), which allows for the representation of social actors in discourse according to their activities, their occupation or the roles that they occupy in society. Additionally, social actors who are functionalized in discourse often benefit from a higher social status. In the coursebooks, male characters are most frequently functionalized, while the roles of female characters are represented as temporary activities lacking any real qualification and corresponding social status. Example (6), an excerpt of a recording where several characters present themselves, provides a further illustration of this point.

(6)

[...]
EMMA : Je m'appelle Emma, ça s'écrit avec deux M. E – deux MA. J'étudie le commerce international dans une école à Amsterdam. Pour gagner ma vie, **je travaille comme serveuse** dans un restaurant.
TOM : Je suis Thomas Glaser, mais on m'appelle Tom. Je suis originaire de New York, mais maintenant je vis à Montréal, au Québec. Je travaille dans la haute couture. **Je suis styliste**.
[...]
(Penfornis, 2011: 10)

Representing public and private spheres

A last area that will be presented here relates to the representation of public and private spheres. The public sphere within the context of the coursebooks is that of the company and the corresponding activities and tasks of the people that inhabit that space, while the private sphere is that of the family and all the activities related to one's personal and family life. In the texts, the private sphere is most frequently integrated through what van Leeuwen (2008) calls "relational identification", a discursive operation which represents social actors according to their personal, familial or professional relationships and is realized in discourse through a limited set of nouns that are indicative of these relationships (*friend, aunt, colleague, etc.*). In the texts, kinship terms introduced by a possessive determiner (*my daughter, my son, my wife, my husband, etc.*) form the basis of the relational identifications observed and contribute to highlighting aspects of the characters' identities while at the same time integrating elements of one's private life into the public and professional sphere. In the texts, female characters will most frequently refer to their children or to their husbands, and as a result, different dimensions of their identities (as a mother, as a wife) become evident. This discursive operation contributes furthermore to the representation of a porous boundary between professional and private life for working women in the coursebooks of both languages, as well as the representation of traditional gender roles and the obligations that result from the biological differences between women and men.

Conclusion

This article presented some of the ways gender-linked stereotypes continue to be embedded in the texts of English and French for business coursebooks, most notably through the representation of action and reflection, hierarchies and professional status, as well as public and private spheres. These stereotypes emerge as a direct result of linguistic markers and various discursive operations identifiable at the level of the text. Multiple factors can influence the creation of the texts, such as the underlying linguistic or communicative objectives, as well as the role of the texts in the overall structure of the coursebooks. The coursebooks themselves also likely undergo several revisions before they are published. The authors, and those involved in the creation of these coursebooks, surely do not intend to represent female characters in stereotypical ways. However, through the process required to create the coursebook, these images and representations become embedded in the linguistic and discursive content. Regarding the identity of the authors, they are predominantly men as far as the English coursebooks are concerned (12 out of 14) and mainly women as for the French coursebooks (9 out of 13). While this variable was not taken into account during the analysis of the texts, it is interesting to note that similar stereotypes emerge from the texts of both languages. It is almost as if the representations, mental images and stereotypes of what it is to be a woman at work are so deeply ingrained that they go unnoticed by the authors, and as a result, remain unchallenged. An analysis, therefore, that seeks to deconstruct the texts and identify the underlying stereotypes is one way that long-held assumptions can be challenged and questioned, and eventually lead to improvements in the ways that women are represented. Since the 1970s much progress has been made when it comes to the visibility of women in educational materials. The results of this analysis illustrate, however, that there is still room for improvement when it comes to representing the professional experiences of women in business language coursebooks.

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